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China in 2012

Mike Wevers

My sons invited me to go see *2012*, and given the hype surrounding this movie I quickly agreed. My youngest son said it was absolutely necessary to go because it was all about him. He will turn 21 on December 21, 2012, a day which supposedly will mark the end of time because some Mayan calendar ends then. With assurances given him that earth's calendar of time did not revolve around his life, we went to the pic.

As disaster films go, the movie was not that bad. The special effects were entertaining, and there was some real science mixed into the "prove a cataclysm is coming" formula. The year 2012 will be the peak year for solar sunspot activity in an 11-year cycle, which will include our sun's magnetic poles changing position. In the movie, it is predicted that this sunspot activity will heat the earth's molten core to such an extent that a cataclysm will be inevitable. Once the world's political leaders are convinced of this at the 2010 Economic Summit (held this year in Canada), they don't have much

time to react. But act they do, and the key player in saving humanity from imminent doom is China. That's Hollywood's take, of course, but it gives significant insight into how the world views China. We claim to oppose its authoritarian

government, but our actions do little to challenge it. In fact, we've gotten used to – even appreciate – the dictatorship.

Global hero

In *2012*, China becomes humanity's modern day Noah – not in response to a calling from God in heaven, but from the ruling class which governs the world. Although the movie makes no mention of this, you get the sense that the world leaders are relieved that China is a dictatorship able to act quickly and without restraint. As soon as the leaders have a plan, you witness some Himalayan mountains being blasted. It's not explicit, but the world leaders have to be

Does the world need a Chinese dictatorship?

thankful that China has access to that mountain range, even if China's heavy-handed occupation of Tibet enables it.

This blasting makes way for a very high construction site where our new Noah is building three modern day marvels that will be able to withstand the next world-wide flood. And unlike Noah, who built the ark in public (much to the derision of his unbelieving neighbours), the world's leaders are grateful that China is able to deploy the labour and resources to build these arks in secret. That keeps the pesky masses away while our world leaders airlift selected animals through the high mountains to safe haven in one of the more comedic,

if not bizarre, scenes in the movie. Thank you, China.

Art imitating life?

It may seem strange that humanity's cinematic hero is China's dictatorship, but it's not so different from what the world now expects of China. We want China to be increasingly cognizant of the effect its economic development is having on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, yet we also need it to be the economic engine which will help the world out of recession. What better form of government to serve such seemingly contradictory outcomes than a dictatorship?

China has long been aware of
See Dictatorship on page 2

The silent crises: Status of the Millennium Development Goals in 2010

Stephanie Tombari

You can measure a civilization, some say, by how well it takes care of its most wounded citizens. Ten years into the 21st century, it is time for a check up.

"The latest report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), produced by the UN, suggests that we have made meaningful progress since the MDGs were signed, but that much of this progress has been threatened by the global economic crisis, the food crisis, and climate change," says Robyn Bright, National Coordinator of Micah Challenge Canada in Ottawa.

And time is running out. The eight MDGs – which include halving

extreme poverty, halting the spread of HIV and providing universal primary education (see sidebar) – come due in 2015. At least, that was the promise made by world leaders at United Nations headquarters in New York ten years ago.

But a 2009 MDG Gap Task Force made up of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and 18 other UN agencies reports that although development aid was up in 2008, donor countries are falling short by \$35 billion per year on the pledge made at the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. There remains a large gap between the 0.7 percent GDP promised by donor countries and what is actually being donated: according to Make



Poverty History Canada, Ottawa had allocated just 0.32 percent to
See Silent crises on page 2



News

Dictatorship *continued*

how hard it is to meet the demands of her people in the face of resource constraints. But consider how effective China's one child per family initiative has been. Even though many raised concerns with this policy, including the Christian church, the policy was effectively implemented, right down to each village cadre. Given the approximate 800 million Chinese when this initiative began, most in the world were generally satisfied that China went down this road, keeping its population to a mere 1.3 billion people some three decades later. First of all, it reduced that country's demand for resources in a world that could not afford to deliver them, and secondly, it effectively curtailed what could have been a more severe problem if China had an even larger population whose demands its own government could not meet domestically.

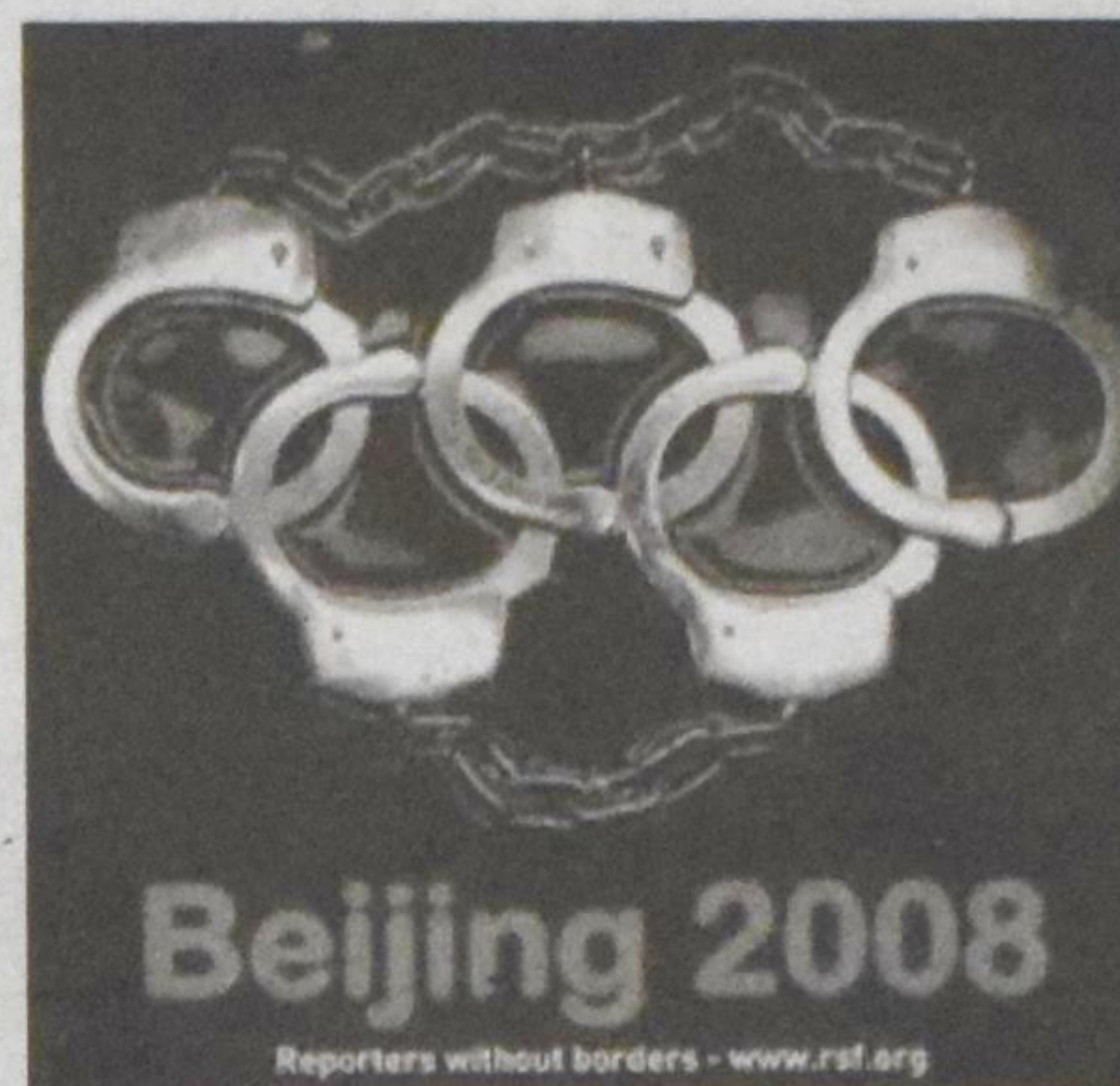
Currently, China is definitely doing its part to keep the world's economy growing. Recently, the *National Geographic* identified several trends. First, China's oil imports, which help fuel its transportation and plastics manufacturing industries, grew from 166 million barrels in 1996 to 1,064 million barrels in 2006, more than a six-fold increase over 10 years. To meet increasing demand for electricity for home and industrial consumption, China is adding the equivalent capacity of the entire U.K. power grid each year.

Per capita car ownership in China is another interesting trend. It is now equivalent to what it was in the U.S. in 1915; that is, 9 cars per 1,000 residents compared to the 450 per 1,000 that the U.S. now enjoys. This means that there are 11.5 million privately owned cars in China. However, China's expanding middle class is driving car ownership up by 1,000 vehicles per day. Even though the cars may not be the gas guzzlers we have driven, just imagine the effects of the volume such growth entails!

That growing middle class also sees what North Americans enjoy in housing, appliances and other amenities of our western life. China's dictatorship again acts to meet its own and the world's needs. The command economy can develop a controlled middle class who sees their destiny tied to the success of its government, further inhibiting dissent. A slowly growing middle class also serves the world's purpose of lessening China's otherwise insatiable appetite for the earth's limited resources, enabling the west to continue to enjoy a disproportionate share.

Behind the Great Wall

Disturbingly, however, China's command economy allows it to run roughshod over the safety of its workers, particularly coal miners. For example, while 2012 was showing in theatres, over 87 miners were killed in an



underground mining disaster in China's northern province of Heilongjiang, with hardly any world reaction. This is only one of many such mining disasters resulting from the huge demand for coal-fired electricity.

This seeming western duplicity, the need to see China's continued economic prosperity but wanting it to be limited, is replicated in our expectations of politics in China. We were outraged by the harsh manner in which the government and the People's Liberation Army cracked down on a mild democratic movement years ago, but it did not stop the world from going to celebrate China's Summer Olympics. To assuage some criticism, China's government said they would allow some authorized opposition "protests" during the Olympics in a specifically designated area in Beijing. Unfortunately, the dissidents needed to apply for approval to hold protests, and no



approvals were given. Most recently, the world generally remains quiet as a leading dissident, Liu Xiaobo, goes to trial for subversion. If the world doesn't want a dictatorship in China, our actions and our inaction certainly belie that claim.

Now if you are still worried about the Mayan calendar and its end time prediction leading to more dependence on China, a little research will tell you it is only one of a few pre-Columbian Mesoamerican calendars. One calendar includes prediction of events well into the fourth millennium. So my son and readers can relax, at least about that end-time prediction. We cannot be so certain about that 2012 sunspot activity though, nor China's role on the world stage in the future. What is certain is that if we want to see real democratic change in China, how the world engages the Middle Kingdom must change.

Mike Wevers recently retired as Assistant Deputy Minister with the Alberta Government's Treasury Board. He remains interested in political economy, and is a film buff.

**The silent crises** *continued*

"Poverty, disease and famine are just as deadly and destructive as earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis. Individuals ... are taking on these challenges in their communities, volunteering to make a difference. They remain the true champions of our work towards the Millennium Development Goals." — Kofi Annan



international development in 2008. Much of the increases in official development assistance (ODA) have been applied to conflict countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, while some of the poorest countries of Africa have seen very little.

What's needed to make achieving the MDGs a possibility, suggests Mike Hogeterp, is fierce public pressure and a big, fat reality check.

"From the perspective of living in an affluent Northern nation, global poverty and injustice are isolated from our experience and convenient to ignore," says Hogeterp, research and communications manager for Committee for Contact with the Government of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada. "These are issues that rarely generate a groundswell of citizen passion, civil society actions and, therefore, energetic government response. In this light it's not surprising that the urgent priorities that the world agreed to at the turn of the century have slipped off the priority list."

Government commitment to poverty reduction has come into question recently.

In December 2009, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) cut funding to the Canadian ecumenical social justice organization KAIROS, despite a 35-year relationship and without a satisfying explanation.

"The decision to pull funding is deeply disappointing," says Hogeterp. "It comes at a time when Canada's ODA policies are shifting to a focus on the western Hemisphere. This includes a shift away from support for a number of least developed countries in Africa. Canada's aspirations to focus aid are on the surface a good idea, but there has been little in the way of public reflection about how the shift to new priorities and geographical focus will help us to satisfy our MDG responsibilities or even, the legal and moral demands of Bill C-293 (Canada's 'better aid' bill)."

Measured progress

But Bright maintains that the MDGs have experienced some encouraging success. In Sub Saharan Africa, the rate of children in



primary education increased from 58 percent to 78 percent between 2000 and 2007, with a total of 89 percent of children now attending school globally. The use of bed nets for malaria prevention has increased by as much as 54 percent among children under five, and the number of children surviving their first five years has gone down from 93 to 67 deaths per 1000 births.

"Malawi has succeeded in reducing child mortality by 50 percent in less than 20 years, despite being one of the world's poorest countries," Bright explains. "This was made possible through the development of a strong, singular national health plan that attracted donors, as well as an increase in the number of births attended by trained health care workers, increased immunization coverage, and funding for better nutrition."

Maternal health, says Bright, has seen the

least progress. "Since 1990, the number of deaths resulting from pregnancy and child birth has decreased only marginally (from 480 to 450 deaths per 100,000 births). Many of these deaths could be easily prevented through pre-natal care, access to trained health care workers during delivery, and access to emergency obstetric care."

Ways to help

But there's still time for Canada to keep its promises to the world's poor.

"In terms of personal responsibility, we can all take action to see the goals met," says Bright. "Whether it is choosing to drink fair trade coffee, donating the value of that latte to help cover the cost of a malaria-preventing bed net, or partnering as a church with a community in the global South, there is much we can do on our own to reach the goals."

"Support civil society organizations doing development and human rights work in the South and inform parliamentarians that you support this work," suggests Hogeterp. "In a few words: make development and human rights prominent public issues."

"We are living as part of a truly incredible generation," says Bright. "A generation whose global knowledge and interest, whose technological know-how, and whose capacity to mobilize for change is such that we could well see the end of poverty in our generation."

Stephanie Tombari is a freelance writer living in Burlington, Ontario.



News

Faith in numbers: Christianity around the globe

Although ashamed to admit it out loud, I wonder how many Christians derive some comfort in the fact that the faith they profess is the largest on the planet. It certainly hasn't been this way throughout history, and it may not necessarily be the case in the future, but for now we are a majority of sorts. There is a sense of security in numbers.

Unfortunately, majorities can still be misled. More people go to malls in North America than churches. The majority gulp down highly caffeinated coffees and sugar saturated sodas. It was the crowds that insisted on the crucifixion of Christ. The list goes on. Good sense is more often than not distinctly different from common sense.

Meditating too much on the impressive size of Christianity can be, in fact, very unchristian. It can nurture feelings of pride and superiority, implant a false sense of security, and, most fundamentally, militate against a faith that rests solely in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is the opposite of Paul's claim, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Dance of demographics

The fact is Christianity has been on the decline in Canada for decades already. While Reginald Bibby has recently proclaimed a small "renaissance" in church attendance, the numbers are still significantly down from what they were 40 years ago. Christian symbols have been stripped from almost all public institutions.



If Christianity is mentioned in the newspapers, it is linked to sexual abuse, fundamentalism, or homophobia. We are certainly not a revered majority.

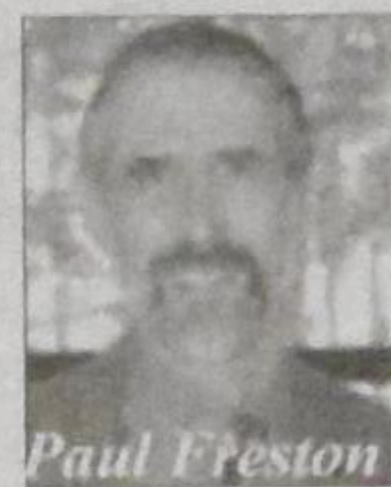
Peter Schuurman lives in Guelph, Ontario where he parents his two children, Joseph and Petra. He is working toward a PhD and teaches World Religion at Redeemer.

In Canada, at least.

In Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the Christian faith is exploding. Latin America is now said to be the numerical heartland of world Christianity. Most of the growth in the global south comes through Pentecostal movements, generating a shift that has been dubbed "The Next Christendom."

Islam has been arguably called the world's fastest growing religion, but most of its growth comes from high fertility rates. Its retention rates are also high, as in Muslim communities there are social and legal sanctions against converting to another faith. Both these factors, however, are mitigated as Muslims move into the developed West.

Most of my information comes from former Calvin College professor Paul Freston. Dr. Freston is now one of the professors in my Religious Studies program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, and he is a leading scholar in religion and globalization.



He recently gave a public lecture entitled "Globalized Christianity and World Politics" in which he surveyed the state of Christianity across the planet. He made some provocative remarks about Christianity being less prone to violence because it is not inherently tied to a state system or law like Islam. He also maintained that in current debates about the "clash of civilizations" – between Islam and the West – little mention is made of the "Christian South," the new heart of world Christianity. The conversation, he suggests, is missing a monumental contextual reality.

Copenhagen dénouement

Hendrik Vlaar

Hordes of protestors, barred NGO observers, backroom deals, failed leadership, and last-minute heroes – COP-15 at Copenhagen turned out to be quite the political and civil maelstrom. So violent were the waters that it may be difficult to orient oneself now that the tempest has passed.

The Copenhagen conference capped two years of UN preliminaries, and as such, global civil society expected leaders to step up and create a working plan of warming mitigation and economic adaptation. But much of the two-week summit was spent in confusion and gridlock. The conference exemplified the inherent difficulty in international political operations. While most countries were willing to concede, in part, to some level of mitigation, Canadian leadership showed, in view of the critics, a complete unwillingness to adapt, change, mitigate, or act in any way to reduce our emission levels. The present government, with its strong western support, chose to ignore domestic public opinion and bow to the political economy of the day.

Failed Canadian leadership is, unfortunately, one of the reasons for Copenhagen's "failure on delivery." On the last day of the conference, Canada had the dubious honour of receiving the "Fossil of the Year" award from Climate Action Network International (CAN), denoting Ottawa's deliberate frustration of climate change negotiations. Leaked cabinet documents revealed Canada's true intentions in coming to Denmark – to sabotage the negotiations and further reduce Canada's already weakening mitigation commitments. Canada, along with other states, has suggested scrapping the internationally accepted base year of 1990 and measuring reductions from a "more contemporary year." The thinking is that the present economy necessitates a higher level of emissions, and that to stem emissions would be to stem economic sustenance. Not only has Canadian leadership failed to act upon the emissions reductions stipulated by the Kyoto Protocol (the 2005 internationally binding agreement), they continue to confound efforts towards real climate protection.

Last shred of hope

Finally Obama, arriving near the end of the conference, gathered a select group of key nations to hash out a plan that would work for them. After 48 hours of baggy-eyed deliberation, the U.S., China, India, South Africa, and Brazil had constructed the official COP15 document. While the final product is noteworthy, it will not be making its way into official legislation anytime soon. The document states that developed nations should give fiscal resources to developing nations, resources earmarked for transition toward a carbon-lite economy. Also outlined are commitments for nations to reduce emissions, those with developed economies being given the heftier burden. While these ambitions are commendable, they are moot if not acted upon. Without a legally binding agreement (such as Kyoto), governments will not act. This is the current issue, as members of the G20 merely "took note" of the document before flying back to their respective states, without acting to bring it towards ratification.

Although COP15 was marked with disappointment, a few points give cause for hope. Copenhagen was a hard meeting, but that's a good thing. The conflicts of interest that threatened to shut-down progress actually means we are getting somewhere. Statespeople are taking climate change seriously by acknowledging that the decisions they make will have tangible consequences. This is encouraging, for while Kyoto was marked by ease of process and multilateral agreement, little manifested on the ground. Copenhagen, on the other hand, may have been difficult, but it was real, and dealing with reality is preferable when economies and lives hang in the balance.

Hendrik Vlaar is a Redeemer student passionate about Ecological and Aboriginal Justice, as well as food and water sovereignty.



Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



China: the Sleeping Christian Giant?

On a similar note, the part of his presentation that caught the interest of the audience and pre-occupied most of the question period was his assessment of Christianity in China. "China is not merely the presumed next great power," he speculated, "it may also be the next cultural powerhouse of Christianity.... China is poised to go through the same sort of numerical explosion in Christian adherence that Africa went through in the 20th century." If the Chinese government will grant full religious freedom to its people, Chinese Christianity (and India, too!) would "constitute a far greater challenge to the remaining western hegemony within the Christian world than Africa...."

This is an incredible thought: that a formerly communist and Buddhist country – which is also the largest country in the world – may become the most significant Christian influence on the planet is a phenomenon of miraculous proportions. It is a long way off, no doubt. But when we think of the global religious situation, we cannot marginalize what is happening in the "New Christendom."

Our faith best not rest on winning a game of numbers, though. Triumphalism in religion undermines its prime directive: love. We need to ask *what kind* of Christianity is flowering – whether it is a militant self-preserving zeal or a full-orbed faith in Christ's kingdom that reaches out to the orphan, widow and scorched earth. Everything, including religion, needs to be subservient to God's shalom. For it is that grace that saves us, nothing else.

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Editorial

Don't bind our consciences, please



Bert Witvoet

It appears that the Board of Trustees of Calvin College has upheld President Gaylen Byker's memo to the faculty and staff that asked them to strictly adhere to the Christian Reformed Church's position on homosexuality, forbidding them to promote a dissenting view. The decision reads: "Advocacy by faculty and staff, both in and out of the classroom, for homosexual practice and same-sex marriage is unacceptable." That statement, "both in and out of the classroom," sounds like a rigid academic straightjacket to me. The faculty senate of Calvin College had earlier voted 36-4 that the Board withdraw the memo. It did not do so. The Board did appoint a special committee to further study the issue, including the question whether or not a future synod should be asked to decide if the CRC's position on homosexuality is a doctrinal issue.

When I read that last suggestion, all kinds of red flags went up for me. I guess I dread the idea that a synod might pronounce that the homosexual issue is to be regarded as a confessional issue.

My friend Stan De Jong lent me *Het Gereformeerden Boek*, a book about Reformed people and church groups in the Netherlands that left the Dutch State Church in the 19th century (Waanders Uitgevers, Zwolle, Willem Bouwman, 2009). It's a coffee table book, although much smaller in size than most. It's filled with pictures and anecdotes, some of them funny, some inspiring, and others not very edifying. Much of the historical information I use in this editorial comes from this book. One story that resurfaced a few times in the book had to do with the dispute "Geelkerken."

The talking serpent

J.G. Geelkerken (1879-1960) was a pastor in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* (let's say the Christian Reformed Church, for all practical purposes) in the City of Amsterdam. During one of his sermons, he wondered whether the serpent in Paradise had really spoken to Eve. In other words, he was not sure whether we should read the story of Adam and Eve in a literal way. One of his parishioners, a certain Hidde Marinus, was disturbed by his pastor's



J.G. Geelkerken

to affirm their declaration. He refused to do that and was subsequently removed from office. A few days later, Rev. Geelkerken's council and many students of the Free University of Amsterdam who supported Geelkerken met in the famous concert hall "Het Concertgebouw," where they sang to him the Dutch rhymed version of Psalm 121: "*Hij is al treft U't felst verdriet, Uw Wachter, die uw voet, voor wankelen behoedt.*" (The Lord is your Keeper in your deepest sorrow, who will not let your foot slip.) Four ministers of the Word followed Geelkerken in his exile, and together they established a new group of churches named *Gereformeerde Kerken in Hersteld Verband* (Reformed churches in Restored Union). Eventually they numbered 26 congregations and 7,000 members.

It took the Dutch Christian Reformed Church 41 years to realize that they were wrong in making their declaration in 1926 that the serpent had really spoken and wrong in removing Geelkerken from office. The synod of 1967 rescinded the decision of 1926, seven years after Rev. Geelkerken had passed away. The synod now allowed for the possibility that the serpent may not have spoken to Eve. By this time Free University professor Harry Kuitert openly declared that the whole story of paradise was not a historical account. This time the Dutch Christian Reformed Church did not make a declaration that would contradict Kuitert. Nor did it speak out against the creation-evolution teachings of professor J. Lever. No one wanted to make these teachings a confessional issue.

Synodical hubris

One can well understand the church's reluctance. Synods had a habit of overstepping their boundaries. In 1920 the Synod of the Dutch Christian Reformed Church pronounced its judgment over a Christian's participation in theatre, dancing and card playing. Several members of Synod, among them the well-known Herman Bavinck, thought that Synod would have done better had it spoken out against immoral business practices and war profiteers, rather than against these less important issues. Nevertheless, the following Sunday Synod's statement was read from the pulpits in all the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

Then there is the infamous Synod of 1944, that took sides in the decades' long debate on whether a child of believing parents can be assumed to be born again. This led to a schism as a large group of ministers and churches

uncertainty and sent in a complaint to his council. I don't know what the council decided, but I do know that Brother Marinus's complaint ended up on the agenda of the Synod of 1926, which met in Assen.

This synod deliberated on the issue and decided that the speaking serpent had been a sensory and observable reality. They sent a telegram to Rev. Geelkerken and asked him

broke away and formed the "Liberated Churches" (liberated from the dictates of a synod). Years later, the Christian Reformed Church apologized for its foolish partisanship and heated arguments at a time when many members of the church were in concentration camps in Germany. But the breach had been made, and the apology was not deemed reason enough to reunite two estranged denominations. The "liberated" church eventually also ran into its own church splits.

Foolhardy theologians

One professor at the Free University expressed his gratitude that he had not become a theologian. Herman Dooyeweerd, known for his development of the Reformational Philosophy of the Law Idea, avoided theological questions like the plague. "I find in the Bible, if it is God's revelation, a number of truths which theologians should not try to explain," he once said. G.E. Langemeyer, President of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, referred to Dooyeweerd as the most original philosopher the Netherlands has ever produced, including Spinoza. Yet this highly intelligent philosopher was so struck by the deep mystery of God's Word that he cautioned against rushing in where angels fear to tread.

Swiss theologian Karl Barth, by the way, did not think much of church life in the Netherlands. According to him, "there is near the mouth of the river Rhine a corner that is filled with smoke." (He spoke German, of course: "Da unten am Rhein, das ist eine Ecke wo es qualmt.") The picture is one of the aftermath of a destructive fire. He was talking about our heritage, folks – a lot of heat but no light. And light is what our world needs badly.



Lessons from the past

As I contemplate a potential request by the Board of Trustees of Calvin College to a synod of the CRC to decide whether or not the church's position on homosexuality is a confessional issue, I am thinking of the sorry history of synodical pronouncements by Reformed churches in North America as well as in the Netherlands. Those who forget about history are doomed to repeat it.

The Christian Reformed Church of North America has in the past also pronounced on a number of dicey issues. The Synod of 1928 warned against movie theatre attendance, while the Synod of 1966 took a more nuanced position when it said that the film arts are a legitimate cultural medium to be used with discernment. On the issue of women in ecclesiastical office various synods have vacillated ever since a study committee to Synod 1973 said that excluding women from ecclesiastical office cannot be defended on biblical grounds. It took succeeding synods 30 years to finally act on that recommendation, although it accepted that there might be biblical grounds for both pro and contra positions. The Synod of 1908 ruled that people who remarry after an unbiblical divorce "are living in continual adultery." In 1956 Synod declared that there was no biblical evidence to support that thesis. In 1924 Synod ruled on Common Grace as an official teaching, which led to the secession of churches who formed the Protestant Reformed Church. A few years before that, the Rev. Harry Bultema was considered to fall outside the doctrinal boundaries with his pre-millennial teachings. This led to the formation of the Berean Reformed Church (a church

Continued on page 5

Christian Courier

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Letters

In the December 28, 2009, issue of our paper, we asked our readers to elaborate on the following question, "Do you think reports of climate exchange are exaggerated?" We received three letters so far. More are welcome. We like to hear other people's opinions. Please send your letters to the editor to Angela Reitsma Bick via angela@christiancourier.ca while Bert Witvoet is in South Africa until March 15.

Let's not be afraid

In the Bible we read many times that God says, "Do not be afraid!" In all the discussions about climate change there is no thought given that there is a God who is in control of the universe, and this God is saying to us today "Do not be afraid." Yes, we do have to be responsible in our care of the things we do, but it is God who is in control of the climate.

Yes, there are those that do not want to accept that there is a God. As a result, they become fear-mongers and are always focused on the worst possible that could happen. Sad to say, many Christians also get caught up in it and go along with it. Let us not give into fear but trust in our God.

Then there is the view of Christian Heritage Party, which does not support the idea of global warming. They have information from scientists that claim that global warming is not true. For more information go to www.chp.ca, or e-mail (nationaloffice@chp.ca).

Harry Salomons
Edmonton, Alberta

Climate change: a historical context

About a half century ago, my Dutch geography textbooks stated that there had been several ice ages; in fact, only a few centuries ago there had been a mini ice age. The implication is that climate change is a natural phenomenon. In 1967 several million dead fish floated down the Rhine River, making me, for the first time, consciously aware that human being were polluters on a grand scale. At Kyoto and Copenhagen scientists argued that climate change and pollution are connected.

A recent poll in Alberta suggested that the majority of Albertans are indifferent to or sceptical about that connection. The historical data as well as receding glaciers make it clear that climate change as a natural phenomenon cannot be denied. And no one can deny that human beings are great polluters. But is there a connection, and is the connection a recent discovery? The Alberta and federal governments seem to be reluctant to fully admit to the first part of the question, and the media act as if it is a recent discovery.

Around 300BC a changing attitude toward nature became apparent in human writings. Before that, nature had been regarded as an ever-present good; now, literature

expressed humankind's alienation from nature, perhaps attributable to the rise of great cities. The Roman poet Horace, for instance, showed a great preference for rural life. Themes of communion with nature started to appear. Nature, at least for the Stoics and Academicians, led to God. Various CC articles by Curt Gesch, Heidi VanderSlikke, and poems by Linda Siebenga are modern examples of this perspective.

In art nature also became prominent. I want to submit that Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 – that pagans had no excuse not knowing God – can be fully appreciated only within the context of the contemporary discussion about the design in creation and the new appreciation of nature.

One final comment: while Christians generally accept the notion of design in creation, many seem to side with the Epicureans, who deny the human influence on climate change. Maybe they can learn something from the other ancients, who held an anthropocentric view, arguing that the earth had been created so that humans could make use of its beauties and resources.

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, Alberta

Don't bind our consciences, please *continued*

which wisely does not make belief in pre-millennialism mandatory for membership).

Careful does it

I am not suggesting that synods should have avoided talking about these issues, but to make these matters confessional issues has too often led to schisms. I like what Synod 1996 said about a Calvin professor who did not agree with the official position on abortion. Synod noted that "synodical decisions do not preclude faculty discussion, debate or disagreement with the substance of the position taken."

I know there is a danger to open the gates to all winds of doctrine, as has happened in the Netherlands. Professor H.N. Ridderbos, who, according to the book I am reading, was perhaps the last great opinion leader in the Dutch CRC, wanted the church to open its doors wider. He wanted a more tolerant and renewed church. But in 1989, when looking back on how the church had developed, he came to the conclusion that the church had gone too far and that it no longer was true to its confessions.

So here we are as denominations, tossed between a rock and a hard place, living the life of a church that is by schisms rent asunder and by heresies distressed. I would suggest that we pray more at synods and decide less. Perhaps we have to take our cue from Herman Dooyeweerd and not pronounce on all kinds of theological and ethical issues.

My advice to our churches and schools is: be slow to bind people's consciences.

Jody Van Dorp gave a chapel address recently that links the environment to social justice. She's a student at Redeemer studying Environmental Science and Business, and to read her thoughts on creation care, turn to page 20.



In spite of little effect, be responsible

The entire discussion about "climate change" is best addressed by breaking it down into four manageable questions:

A: *Is the earth's average temperature increasing?* It was for a few decades, but may not be in recent years.

B: *Is human activity causing this change?* We are probably only one of several factors affecting the climate.

C: *Is global warming really such a bad thing?*

Probably, yes, for some locations, but it will be good for others.

D: *Is there anything we can do about it?* Whatever we do will likely only have a small influence, if any.

Those are my own views, based on admittedly limited research. Clearly the answers are not obvious, nor settled. The

entire "climate change" discussion is a muddled and mixed bag of uncertainties and doubts, that has been hyped up and politicized.

Having said that, however, most of the actions suggested to combat "global warming" are probably good ideas in themselves, regardless of their possible effect on climate: drive smaller and more efficient cars, reduce consumption of non-renewable resources, develop alternative energy sources, waste less and re-use or recycle more.

In short, while we continue to discuss "climate change," we should do all we can to become better stewards of God's Creation.

Ed Norman
Ottawa, Ontario



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Letters/Column

Not much hope, plenty of judgment

I came away perplexed after reading Meridith K.C. Gipson Hoogendam's guest editorial in the December 28 issue ("Through a two-way mirror, darkly"). First, I wondered – and still do – about how somebody who lives in urban Ontario (Toronto?) and who had been sitting in a coffee shop in Buffalo, NY, for a mere three hours has the insight and expertise to make the sweeping judgment that Buffalo is a city "divided by poverty and racism." I have been told that she's an American, but that doesn't mean she knows Buffalo. To characterize an entire city so on scant knowledge doesn't do much to encourage the reader to take seriously whatever else the writer says. My impulse is to say, "Take the beam out of your own urban eye before you attempt to remove the splinter from your neighbour's eye."

Secondly, of the 10 paragraphs that make up this one-page editorial, eight of them – four-fifths – focus on the hopelessness of contemporary urban life as Hoogendam sees it. Only two paragraphs provide the antidote, but rather nebulously. Christ is, of course, that Antidote (as she says), and we are to be his agents of healing in this world. But how? There's no hint of practicality about this editorial. Yet besides that long recital of hopelessness there's a lot of condemnation in it. Are we Christians all complacent? resigned? too prudent to bravely trust God to lead us where he will, and then to follow? If that's how she sees her fellow Christians then I suggest she hasn't seen much of the Body of Christ in the world.

This is not in any way a judgment of the writer as a person (I am not in a position to do that and, of course, would not even if I knew her personally). I'm only critiquing what appears on the page. And I would suggest that, to me, anyway, this was a less than helpful – or hopeful – way to end a calendar year and 12 months of CC issues. I'm hoping the New Year will bring better.

Marian Van Til
Youngstown, New York

New money?

A new kind of money has shown up in the media. Oh, it still is Canadian money, but it appears with a new name. A new name? What is that new name? Well, it's called "taxpayers' money."

Isn't that a misnomer? That "s" at the end usually indicates that the taxpayers are the owners of that money. But is that true? When it is called taxpayers' money it is no longer in the possession of the taxpayers; the name is used for money which the so-called taxpayers have already given out of their hands, or pockets. Governments rightfully own that money. Mind you, citizens feel that they should hold governments accountable for how they spend that money. That's why they pretend they still own it by calling it "taxpayers' money."

When Jesus was on earth, he was asked

Graduate students and Jesus' disciples

Scripture offers many examples of mentoring relationships, in which a senior person trains or mentors someone who later takes over the senior person's role. Joshua begins as Moses' servant but replaces Moses as leader when Moses is forbidden from entering the Promised Land. Elijah trains Elisha; when Elijah is taken up to heaven, Elisha asks for and receives two measures of Elijah's spirit. Jesus chooses disciples who become the leaders of the new church. In all these cases, there is a one-on-one, long-lasting relationship between teacher and disciple. It is through this time of watching how the master deals with a variety of situations that the disciple acquires some of the master's skills, knowledge, and wisdom.



Similar apprenticeship relationships are valuable in many contemporary careers. Before becoming a master plumber, one requires not only book learning but also a number of hours of hands-on training with an experienced plumber. Medical residents train under the skilled guidance and mentorship of senior experienced doctors.

Discipleship and mentorship also take place in the academic world. In undergraduate university education, class sizes may decrease from over 300 in first year to 20 or less in senior years, but even fourth-year students have limited contact with faculty members, never more than a few hours a week. It is in graduate school when one-on-one discipling relationships become possible. Then class time becomes much less important, and the student's relationship with an advisor/supervisor/mentor is at the heart of the educational experience.

Valuable lessons

I have been blessed by good mentors in my graduate experience. I have complete respect for and stand in awe of my graduate advisor, Dr. Jane Stewart. She recently retired, and our celebration of her career brought together many of her graduate students. She was loved and respected by all and had the ability to bring out the best in her students. In my career as a faculty member, I have tried to take the lessons I learned from her and use them in teaching my students.

The student-supervisor relationship is critical, because it shapes how we as students think and work in an academic

situation. It frames how we do research and how we tackle problems that arise in our discipline. In science, the specific research we do as graduate students is tied to the tools available and the skills and interests of the advisor.

Students who worked with Dr. Stewart focused their research in two areas, drug addiction and sex differences. The mentor knows the research area and what is likely to work or be interesting and can guide the student in fruitful paths. The mentor helps the student ask good questions that lead to meaningful research. Bad research is doubly harmful because it both provides misleading answers and clouds the issue for the future work. The mentor also helps the student to write about the specific research project in a way that others understand, that brings together a substantial body of prior work, and that shows how the student's "brick" of research adds to the "wall" of knowledge. Writing clearly on a complex issue is not a simple task, and the pieces must be fit together to result in a logical argument.

Finally, the advisor models the curiosity, childlike enthusiasm, and perseverance that will take one through those times when research results don't fit and nothing seems to work. It is one thing to complete a PhD; it is another to maintain enthusiasm for research throughout a thirty- to forty-year career. It is a tragedy to see a professor who has lost his or her enthusiasm and is just going through the motions.

We could do better

In our Reformed religious communities, we have not really developed modern models of this long-term mentoring relationship; perhaps we should. The CRC's Synodical Faith Formation Committee is a step in the right direction. In other Christian traditions, there are monks and nuns who have made a long-term commitment to serve a religious life and receive long-term training.

Earlier in Christendom, the Desert Fathers and Mothers had an elaborate system ranging from novice to master. Except in rare circumstances, the closest we come is in our training of ministers. Student ministers benefit from a mentoring relationship during their internships, but often this "practicum" is short, sometimes in a vacant church; it doesn't replace the opportunity of working intimately for years with a wise and good mentor. We need to find more ways of making it possible to learn from the wisdom of our elders.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.



whether it was lawful for Jews to pay taxes to Caesar, to the Roman authorities. And Jesus replied: "Show me the coin you use to pay taxes." And when they gave him such a coin, with the portrait of the Caesar on it, he made the ownership of that required tax money quite clear when he said, "Pay Caesar what is Caesar's." It was no longer "taxpayers' money"; it had become Caesar's money. Jesus actually indicates that further when he says, "Pay what you owe."

Strictly speaking, "tax money" is not our own anymore; it belongs to "Caesar." The same is true for what follows: "And give to God what is God's." (See Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25).

William L. Vander Beek
Langley, British Columbia



News

Shifting horizons: Christian charity fined over employee morality code

Harold Alkema

Christian Horizons (CH), an Ontario Christian charity organization that provides housing and assisted living services for people with developmental challenges, has been sued by a former employee. Connie Heintz, a long-time employee, willingly signed the organization's morality code when she began working at the Kitchener-based organization. Five years later, she began to question her Mennonite background, entered a lesbian relationship and left CH in 2000. After resigning, she brought a formal complaint before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (ONHT). The tribunal ruled in her favour and ordered her former employer to pay \$23,000 in fines, as well as two years wages and benefits. It also demanded that CH rescind its morality code and required CH employees to attend anti-discrimination training.

The tribunal also attacked CH's policy in scathing language. "Christian Horizons' policy is discriminatory," the ONHT said in its ruling, "While some elements of Canadian society may continue to debate whether gays and lesbians should be treated equally and entitled to equal rights and opportunity, from a legal perspective that debate has ended." The ruling continued, "[its] policy, based on the belief that homosexuality was unnatural and immoral, engendered fear, ignorance, hatred and suspicion."

Part of ONHT's reason for the ruling was the fact that CH provides services to a wide cross-section of developmentally challenged people of all faiths, and receives \$75 million through the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. ONHT recognized that some Christian groups serving a clientele from a single denomination or faith group could place restrictions on the conduct of its employees, but as a publicly funded organization CH is subject to the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Further implications

Don Hutchinson, counsel for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), which is intervening in the Heintz vs. Christian Horizons case, counters that the decision is unfair in that it punished CH for practising basic evangelic Christian principles. The charity refuses to turn away persons of other faith backgrounds, but in the court's view, Hutchinson argues, this means they must turn their back on their own moral codes.

Further, one could contend CH's very success in assisting persons with developmental challenges is working against them. CH receives their annual grant because they are one of a several organizations that have helped Ontario move away from its failed institutional model of care for persons with developmental challenges. The residential care model used by CH is widely recognized as superior and much better for residents, their families and

other stakeholders. Thus Ontario receives the benefit of CH's work, which is based solely on Christian principles, but would like to restrict the application of those principles when they are deemed to be too demanding on an individual. CH's grievance is that this decision nullifies the practice of their Christian values in the workplace.

Joanne McGarry of the Catholic Civil Rights League has added that if the Ontario Superior Court upholds this decision it could have widespread legal consequences that will apply to many types of organizations. She notes that independent schools, residences, clubs and cooperative housing have codes

of conduct that require a signatory to refrain from certain legal activities voluntarily. If the Heintz vs. Christian Horizons ruling is upheld, McGarry notes that those contracts could be "open to re-interpretation upon request."

The importance of the case is also underlined by the number of organizations intervening in the Superior Court litigation. In addition to EFC, the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, the Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops, the gay rights group EGALE and several other organizations are intervening in the hearing.

Currently Christian Horizons is

*appealing some parts of the decision, but has eliminated its employee morality code in light of ONTH's decision. The code forbade homosexual and extra-marital relationships, pornography and pre-marital sexual activity.

CH is Ontario's largest operator of special needs residential homes with 180 group homes, 1,400 residents and 2,500 staff.

Harold Alkema works as a researcher with a private firm in Ottawa specializing mainly in Native Affairs and historical research.



A question of values:

"I knew this was going to happen!" exclaimed my wife upon hearing that Canada's Junior Hockey Team would not achieve a sixth straight gold medal in world competitions.

Depending on your interpretation you might say that it was a matter of counting your chickens before they hatched. Or we were too confident. Or we should have "knocked on wood." Or we "jinxed ourselves" by talking about it. Or our team was second best in the world in one competition. Or they did their best (or did not do their best).

I would like us to think of some other activities besides hockey in which we are invited by reality to invite an interpretation or judgement.

The ditch digger

My friend Gerry had a problem. He owned a house in low, flat, Richmond, B.C. That's delta land, dyked and ditched and pumped. (Incidentally, Richmond is home of the 2010 Olympic Speed Skating Oval, on which my 19-year-old friend worked, building and installing roofing panels. You should see it at night!)

Gerry, living in Richmond before massive urbanization, lived in a subdivision of "B.C. Homes," two Kleenex boxes stacked on top of each other supported by a concrete pad. The problem is this: when one lives from one meter above, to one meter below sea level, drainage can be a pretty important problem. And the bottom floor was getting wet.

So Gerry decided that he would have to dig a narrow ditch around the perimeter of the foundation, lay down some crushed rock, install Big-O 4" drainage pipe, run a line to the roadside ditch, and then backfill. Quite a job. Because Bobcats weren't yet

very common, Gerry asked a friend - I'll call him Hendrik because I've forgotten his name - if he would help. "Sure, how about on Saturday?"

Saturday morning, Gerry got up a little later than on weekdays, peered out the sliding patio door and saw ... rows - rows of upturned pieces of sod, each exactly the same size - longitudinal mounds of soil in a precise line alongside a trench that would have needed a surveyor to make it any straighter. And a perfect bottom to the drainage trench. You could check the drainage all along the foundation with half a bucket of water: it was that good.



What do we say about Hendrik, who was certainly strong, skilled, trained, experienced, helpful, and an early-riser? He received no medal but must have qualified as one of the best spades-men in the world. Would he have received a gold, a silver, or a bronze if anyone actually held world competitions in spading?

Would Hendrik have devoted himself to endless training sessions, weekend tournaments, fund-raisers? Doubtful. Hendrik would have said that he trained his whole life, that he'd not skip church for any tournament, and that he didn't need to raise funds, except for his church offerings, mortgage, and Christian school tuition.

Gerry's "B.C. House" has long been sold. It may be still standing, or perhaps can now be found beneath a strip-mall, a "monster house," or a casino. Let's

assume it's gone: Hendrik's work is gone; his skills (seemingly) a waste. Certainly there is not much demand for spades-men these days. And no Senior World Spading Championship in which Hendrik could compete.

I don't think Hendrik is still alive. Was he, as A.E. Housman commented in "To An Athlete Dying Young:

[a] "smart lad, to slip betimes away from fields where glory will not stay"? Or should we think, "vanity of vanities, all is meaningless?" What did Spurgeon mean when he said,

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last"? Was he thinking of junior hockey? Evangelism? Or digging ditches? And what about us? Whom do we honour, which skills do we honour? Whose work, what kind of activity "lasts" in our memories?

Thirty years to build soil

Yesterday, a friend remarked, "Our soil is very shallow here, but little by little with all the sheep manure, we'll get good soil here - in about thirty years."

Gene Logsdon describes a tiny field he has worked on for a long time. "Another farmer, walking across the field, picked up a handful of that black loam and let it slide out between his fingers. 'If all the land were like this, wouldn't farming be paradise,' he said." (*The Gardener's Guide to Better Soil*)

Ditch-digging, soil improvement, living close to the soil from which God made us. There's plenty of work left for athletes who want to honour the Creator, the creation, their bodies and their neighbours. They may even wear their silver medals while awaiting a crown.

Curt Gesch has a medal! He won it in a typing speed competition in 1966. Alas, he was very poor at spading the garden.



Church

British PM says: Christians should not leave faith at the door

LONDON (TCI) – British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has admitted ahead of the general election in the UK that Christian engagement in politics is beneficial for building a better society.

In a video released earlier this month Brown said the public square is more than just a market place and that it cannot be stripped of values. "I don't subscribe to the view that religion should somehow be tolerated but not encouraged in public life, that you can somehow ask people to leave their faith at the door when they enter a town hall or a Commons chamber," he said.

When he spoke of his handling of Britain's financial crisis Brown said he was reminded of what he had learnt in church as

a child. Referring to the story of the Good Samaritan he said, "Where there is hardship you cannot and must not pass by on the other side."

He added, "So the lessons of the Gospels need not be kept separate from political life.

for *The Daily Telegraph*, as an attempt to "drive religion from the public sphere."

Under Brown's leadership the government has also introduced the Children, Schools and Families Bill which seeks to make sex and relationship education compulsory

Critics cite [Brown's] anti-Christian policies

If Christians engage with politics then all of us together can build a society where wealth helps more than the wealthy, good fortune serves more than the fortunate, riches enrich not just some of us but all."

Brown's own bills are the problem

But many British Christians say recent laws have made it difficult for them to live out their faith in public. Brown has not supported such people. Christian nurses, doctors, teachers and care workers are among those who have faced problems at work because of their beliefs in recent months. Several Christian groups have warned that the government's own Equality Bill could pose a further threat to Christian freedoms.

In December a government equalities minister admitted that churches should be "lining up" lawyers to defend themselves against secular legal challenges under the Equality Bill. The Bill was described by one media commentator, George Pitcher writing

from the age of five. Last year Brown's government tried to delete a free-speech protection to a controversial "gay hate law" using the Coroners and Justice Bill. However, the move was defeated in the House of Lords.

In October the Prime Minister controversially called for gay couples to be allowed to have civil partnership ceremonies inside Parliament. Brown has made a number of moves recently to encourage homosexual voters to back his Labour Party. In July he told the organizers of a gay pride march taking place in London that they had "changed the world."

Earlier in 2009 he invited the organizers of a controversial month-long drive to teach school children about homosexuality to a reception at 10 Downing Street. At the reception he attacked as "unacceptable" a measure reserving marriage for one man and one woman passed by public vote in California.



Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

2009 study confirms abortion-breast cancer link

BETHESDA, Md. (CNA) – A 2009 study co-authored by a researcher who has previously denied an abortion-breast cancer link shows a statistically significant increase in breast cancer risk among women who have had abortions or who use oral contraceptives. The study by researchers including Jessica Dolle of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research contained a table reporting a statistically significant 40 per cent risk increase for women who have had abortions.

The Coalition on Abortion/Breast Cancer

(CABC), notes that the study lists abortion as among "known and suspected risk factors." The CABC says that one co-author of the study, researcher Dr. Louise Brinton of the U.S. National Cancer Institute (NCI), had organized a 2003 NCI workshop on the abortion-breast cancer link. That workshop had said the non-existence of an abortion-breast cancer link was "well established." CNA contacted Dr. Brinton for comment but did not receive a reply by publication time.

Dr. Joel Brind, who is a CBCP advisor and president of the Breast Cancer Prevention

Institute and a professor of endocrinology at Baruch College at City University of New York, said that the study's findings on abortion are not new. Rather, they repeat the "modest but significant" findings of the 1990s which found a breast cancer risk factor increase of between 20 and 50 per cent. However, he said Dr. Brinton's participation in the study was significant because the NCI has "firmly maintained" a position denying an abortion-breast cancer link since 2003.

The study, titled "Risk factors for triple-

negative breast cancer in women under the age of 45 years," was published in the medical journal of the American Association for Cancer Research's (AACR), "Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention."

'The pill' can also be deadly

Researchers also found a significant link between the use of oral contraceptives and a particularly aggressive cancer known as triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC). Brind said that according to the study, women who start oral contraceptives before the age of 18 multiply their risk of TNBC by 3.7 times. Those who were users of oral contraceptives within one to five years before the study showed a risk 4.2 times the average.

TNBC is associated with high mortality. Brind suggested that oral contraceptives may function not merely as a secondary carcinogen. Rather, the synthetic estrogen-progestin combination or its metabolic byproducts may be a primary cause of the cell mutations that lead to cancer formation.

Coalition on Abortion/Breast Cancer president Karen Malec criticized the NCI, the American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen for the Cure and other cancer organizations for not issuing nationwide warnings to women on the basis of the study.

Spanish youth pray for victims of terrorism

MADRID, Spain (CNA) – A large group of young people gathered before the World Youth Day Cross earlier this month at the El Pozo train station to pray for victims of terrorism. Sixty-seven people died there during the March 11, 2004 bombings.

The event was part of the preparations for WYD 2011, which will take place in Madrid. It was attended by numerous youth volunteers and disabled young people.

Victor Hernandez of the Archdiocese of Madrid's Health Care Ministry said, "We are all praying in the same way, regardless of our physical state. Occasions such as these show that values important to young people include not only strength and beauty, but also the capacity to give of oneself, solidarity and striving for the dignity of all the children of God."

The theme for the 2011 WYD is "Rooted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith" from Colossians 2:7. The Pope participates in the event and past Youth Days have attracted between 300,000 and half a million Catholic young people.



Memorial candles at El Pozo Train station.

News

Missionaries spent a terrifying night

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (CRC News) – Missionaries Howard and Ruth Van Dam spent Tuesday night experiencing one terrifying aftershock after another in the wake of the massive earthquake that hit Haiti late on Tuesday, January 12.

The Van Dams, who serve with Christian Reformed Church World Missions, joined with their neighbours in the street to try to get some rest, because the earthquake severely

damaged their home. The earthquake centered on the capital of Port-au-Prince, where the Van Dams live. The area is home to about three million people.

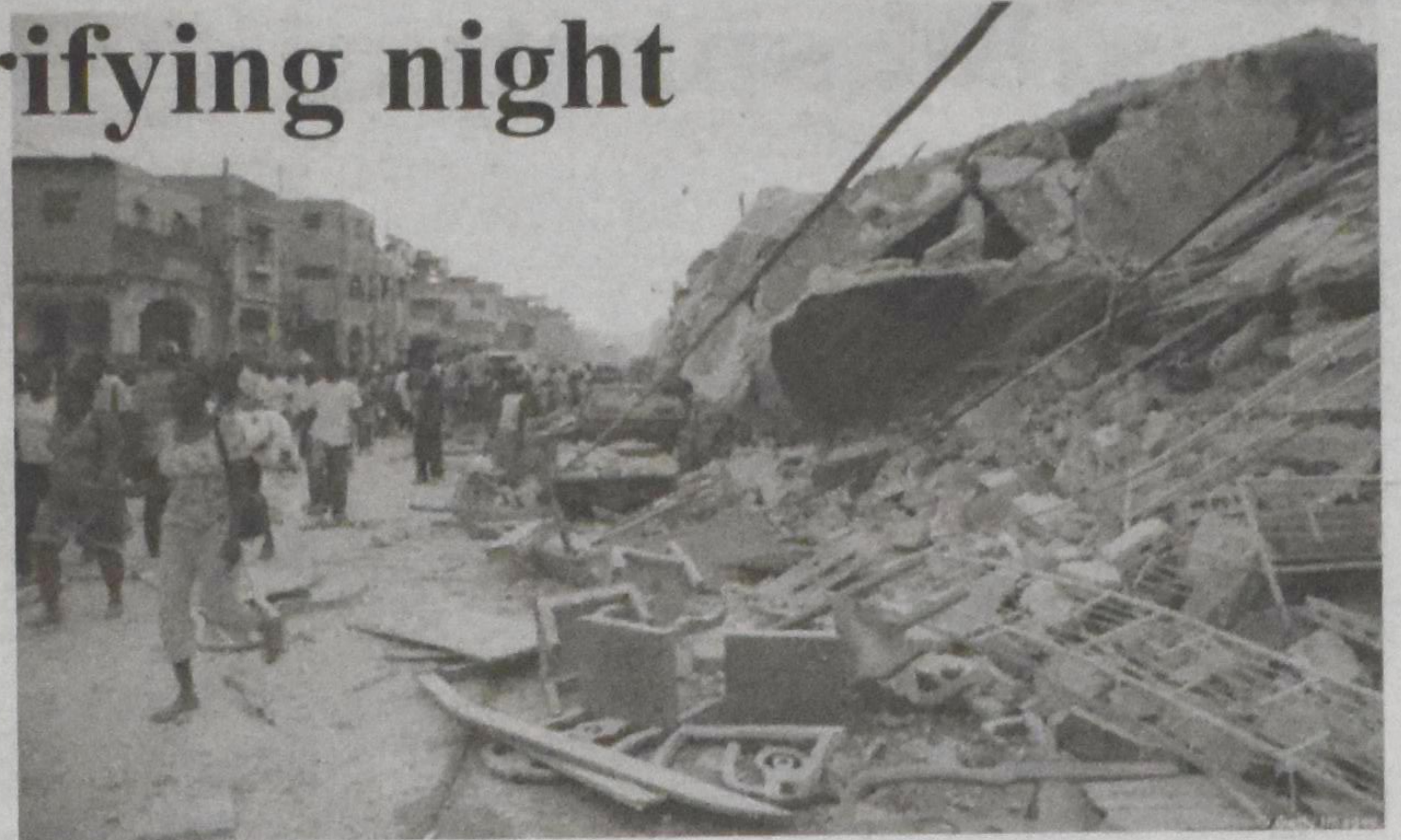
"The people in the ravine beside our house were praising and singing to God all night long. Still this morning we feel aftershocks but just slight ones," the Van Dams wrote to CRWM the morning after the quake.

It was reported one day after the quake that all North American staff serving with Christian Reformed World Missions, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) and Back to God Ministries International were spared from physical harm. At the time of writing, the CRC did not have full information about the status of the Haitian personnel serving with partner organizations.



The Van Dams say the earthquake caused both of their water cisterns to break, meaning they have no running water. Walls broke outside their home and serious cracks appeared in the walls inside.

"We are now beginning to clean up our



home slowly. There is a lot of damage. We're not sure if it's actually livable," they reported.

"We are hearing reports from friends and co-workers. Most are fine and we are so thankful. But we have also heard some horror stories and we are burdened. Please pray for wisdom as we decide what to do."

Widespread devastation

The earthquake measured 7.0 on the Richter scale and was the strongest earthquake to rock Haiti in more than 200 years. A hospital collapsed and many buildings were heavily damaged; including the National Palace and the headquarters of the United Nations peacekeeper force. Officials reported many bodies in the streets and an aid official described the situation as "total disaster and chaos."

United Nations officials said a large

number of U.N. personnel were killed in the quake. News reports estimate that thousands of others died in the quake.

"Communications were widely disrupted, making it impossible to get a full picture of damage as powerful aftershocks shook a desperately poor country where many buildings are flimsy. Electricity was out in some places," according to one early news account.

As survivors clear rubble, search for loved ones, and mourn their losses, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) is providing support and preparing plans for long-term aid. Its immediate response will be to meet urgent needs for things like water, shelter and food.

"We want to get survivors out of the sun, out of the damage, and hydrated," said CRWRC's Disaster Program Manager, Jacqueline Koster.

CRC in Canada important to resettling refugees

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – The Canadian branch of the Christian Reformed Church in North America remained busy in 2009 working to resettle refugees from around the world with the help of individuals, organizations, agencies and many CRC congregations.

In 2009, 90 families (265 individuals) arrived in Canada under the auspices of the sponsorship agreement that the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) holds with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The majority of these families were sponsored directly by family members (former refugees) already residing in Canada who requested help in sponsorship from CRWRC.

The Canadian CRC office in Burlington, Ont., also helps in the process of screening and then in placing refugee families in congregations across the country.

CRWRC has a sponsorship agreement with the government of Canada which allows churches to sponsor eligible refugees from anywhere in the world. Those refugees can be "named" by the churches and then must go through a rigorous process to be accepted under the refugee sponsorship program, says Rose Dekker, refugee resettlement director

for the CRC in Canada.

The refugee application processing times are very long at Canadian overseas visa posts, particularly for refugees from 18 countries in eastern Africa whose applications are all processed at the Canadian High Commission in Nairobi, Kenya. Right now, at the beginning of 2010, a wait time of up to 50 months is being projected for new refugee applications received at that Canadian post.

"We pray and advocate for faster processing times overseas so that these families may soon reach a safe haven in Canada," says Dekker. Her colleague in the refugee work at CRWRC is Rebecca Walker, Refugee Associate.

Alternatively, says Dekker, churches may opt to receive a family that has already been pre-selected and approved for settlement by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. These families arrive in a much shorter time.

Taking full responsibility

CRC congregations in Canada have settled thousands of families in Canada since 1979 when the first privately sponsored refugees began arriving in Canada from Southeast Asia.

The Canadian government does not fund

resettlement costs for the privately sponsored refugee program in Canada. Instead, churches "take on full financial responsibility for the newcomer families for their first 12 months in Canada," says Dekker.

"This means that they also take on full responsibility for helping the family to find housing, jobs and ESL or other educational opportunities. They help enroll the children in school, help the family access medical care and arrange for transportation.

"In other words, they are involved in every aspect of the newcomers' lives. There is no funding from the government of Canada for privately sponsored refugees, although

depending on the community, they may freely access such programs as ESL.

"Church members encourage the families to settle well and become independent and in the process many firm and lasting relationships are formed between the refugee family and members of the sponsoring congregation," says Dekker.

Recently CRWRC was honored with a letter from the Minister of Immigration of Canada, the Honourable Jason Kenney, recognizing the Christian Reformed Church in Canada's 30 years of involvement with the private sponsorship of refugees.

2009 resettlement specifics

Here is a look at some of refugee resettlement work done in the past year by the CRWRC in Canada:

Bethel CRC in Edmonton received a Burmese (Karen) refugee family of eight members who had been in a refugee camp in Thailand for many years.

Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ontario, received two families who had fled from Iraq to Syria. A young woman from Eritrea was received by Calvin CRC in Ottawa.

In 2009, 39 new refugee sponsorships were submitted, but the families have not yet arrived in Canada. These sponsorships were submitted by churches in Scarborough, Dundas, Kitchener, Sarnia and Hamilton, Ontario; Fellowship, West End, and Maranatha in Edmonton; St. Albert, Alberta; and Regina, Saskatchewan.

Islam

Muslim spirituality

Bill Steele

Rose had stopped being part of a church. During her nursing studies at university, specialising in palliative care, she had been taught that spirituality is important and that in her profession she should respect all different types of spirituality. "Each individual has his or her own spirituality. There is none that should be imposed on any patient." In most secular institutions the ban on the *imposition* of one's spirituality is used to deny one *offering* a spiritual perspective that one believes to be normative, that is a Christian spiritual perspective. I recently read of a visiting nurse in England being fired for offering to pray with some patients.

It's true that there are many spiritualities. In addition to the spirituality that denies spirituality (present in many institutions), there are Muslim spiritualities, Hindu, Buddhist and other spiritualities. And of course we must remember Christian spirituality.

I want to write in this article about Muslim spirituality. There are two significant streams of spirituality in Islam. The Wahhabi stream, which is found mainly in Saudi Arabia but is being spread in Africa by Muslim missionaries from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and the Sufi stream.

Wahhabi spirituality

This stream vigorously denies the Sufi movement and has frequently persecuted Sufi Muslims. It may even be said that it denies what we commonly know as spirituality. Wahhabi Islam denies the separation of body and soul which is sometimes a concomitant of spirituality. It holds that the body is the workshop of the soul. So the soul should never withdraw from bodily activities and pull out from the world to engage in ascetic practises. Men are believed the vice-gerents of God in the world. So, according to Abdul Alla Maududi, spirituality is what one does in "the home, the family, the neighbourhood, the society, the market-place, the office, the factory, the school, the law courts, the police station, the parliament, the peace conference and the battlefield" *in submission and obedience to Allah*.



Wahhabis pray on Kosovo streets

The spiritual goal of the Muslim believer is to be near to Allah by bringing his will into complete submission to Allah's will and to regulate all the affairs of the world in accordance with the law revealed in the Koran and the traditions about Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. These traditions were written by his companions and their followers during the

first three hundred years of Islam. Only in this submission will the believer be near to Allah. Nearness to Allah must not be confused with the Christian notion of communion with God, which involves the whole person, including intellect and emotions. It is entirely a matter of the will and holding some specific beliefs. Any kind of mysticism is rejected.

The five pillars of Islam define spiritual practises. These are 1, prayer five times a day; 2, the fast of Ramadan; 3, almsgiving; 4, the pilgrimage to Mecca; 5, jihad, or holy war. The path of spiritual development along which these practises lead has four stages for the individual; faith, then obedience, then Allah-consciousness displayed in one's daily obedience, then godliness. This last stage, according to Abdul Alla Maududi, is the attainment of "the highest excellence in words, deeds and thoughts, identifying his will with the will of Allah and harmonizing it, to the best of his knowledge and ability, with the Divine will. He thus begins to like what is liked by the Lord and to dislike what He dislikes". This path of spiritual development is also meant for communities and nations. A Muslim community may pass through the four stages of spiritual development and may reach the ultimate stage of godliness. A nation-state also, through its government and its administration, may become faithful, obedient, Allah-conscious and godly. The goal of the Wahhabi Muslim community is

that a godly, Muslim, state come into existence. Abdul Alla Maududi says, "The highest form of civilization, based on goodness, is then reached."

Sufi spirituality

The Islam with which I was familiar while living in Guinea is a weak form of Tijaniyya Islam, which is loosely related to Sufi Islam. There are many variations of Sufi Islam, and so I will attempt to present what is common to most of them.



Whirling to music

The goal of the Sufi is the attainment of Divine Love by "Almighty God's annihilating man with respect to his ego and self-centredness and then reviving him spiritually with the lights of His Essence." (Quote from Web page of Fethullah Gülen).

Self-annihilation in God and existing only as love is the goal. This is achieved by various practices: practicing the five pillars, obeying the Sharia (the laws of Islam), adoring Allah by focusing on heartbeats and saying his name in time to them, using a string of 99 beads to say the 99 names of God mentioned in the Koran while fingering each bead (this is often done while walking in the street). The members of one sect, the Dervishes, practice whirling to music in order to enter a trance-like state in which they are only conscious of the One, Allah.

The way of the Sufi or the Tijaniyya is followed under the guidance of a master and involves strict adherence to the Muslim religious and moral code. Thus through mystical practices and the observance of the five pillars and the rest of the Sharia law one achieves merit with Allah, communion with Allah, and hopes to achieve salvation.

There are some similarities between Wahhabism and Reformed Christianity: the denial of sacred/secular dualism, the desire to bring one's will into harmony with the will of God, the willing submission to God. These can form bridges in our witness to Muslims.

One can understand why the Wahhabis condemn Sufism. There is a hardness about many Wahhabis which makes them impervious to demonstrations of love. Thus demonstrations of love by Christians in their witness do not impress them. Sufis are more attracted by love. This does not mean that they are attracted by Christianity, but they do find Christ attractive. The use of meditation by Sufis is somewhat akin to Christian mediation. Of course Christians do not seek to be absorbed into God, as the Sufi does.

The centre of Christian witness to Muslims is the person, compassion and love demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ. Arguing about doctrine with Muslims is useless, even harmful. But opening the

Gospels to them and performing loving service to them is the beginning of witness, which one prays will some day lead them to faith in Christ.

The example of Baby

"Baby" seems to Westerners to be a strange name for a man. It is the English translation of what one man was called in my village in Guinea. His name was actually Ahmed, but he was named after his father. It would have been disrespectful to address him using his father's name, so he was called "Baby", even though in his mid-thirties.

Baby was an average Tijaniyya Muslim who mixed his belief in Allah with animism. He had a strong belief in the activity of jinn, naughty capricious spirits made of fire. Belief in jinn is actually a Muslim belief, but attached to that he used various magic practices to protect himself and his family from jinn. Baby also was in the habit of using the services of marabouts (witch-doctors), with their magic incantations to heal diseases and prevent diseases.

Some Wahhabi missionaries from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait came to Baby's uncle's village. His uncle was persuaded by them that the Tijaniyya Islam his village practiced, with its mixture of animism, was not true Islam. So he began to study the Koran with them on a regular basis. Soon, his wives, who had been used to dressing with the colourful clothes so loved by African women, began to appear shrouded entirely in black. When out in public they wore a thick veil that covered their face, even their eyes.

Baby was convinced by his uncle that he should adopt a truer form of Islam. So he became a Wahhabi. His wife soon began dressing entirely in black. At first she did not wear a veil when I was present, but after some months she began to wear a veil for me also. When I asked him about his acceptance of Wahhabism he said that he had been converted. He had been dissatisfied with everyday Islam because of its admixture with paganism. "Now I'm on the straight path. I am a righteous man."

Passing through the four stages of spirituality became his goal: the four stages for the individual, remember, are faith, then obedience, then Allah-consciousness, then godliness. He now believes himself to be a faithful, obedient Allah-conscious man. He is striving to attain godliness. Another goal for him is that his country should have a strict Muslim government that governs by Sharia law. He believes that persuasion by argument is how others will be converted. Wahhabis teach that having many children is another method of becoming the majority in the country. Baby thinks it's only a matter of time until the country will become truly Muslim.

Baby today

I have a great deal of affection for Baby. He is a dear friend. I also have a great deal

Kuyper

Abraham Kuyper and work

Bert den Boggende
19th century Dutch economic situation

For much of the 19th century the Netherlands was an economic backwater. By 1870 it was still in the first phase of industrialization and in the pre-capitalist stage. With a significant population increase, mainly in the countryside, and poor skills it is no wonder that the wages were low, between 50 and 80 cents a day. Children's work expanded, with children as young as four earning as little as 5 cents a day for a workday of up to 15 hours. Many workers lived in cellars. Diseases often decimated the population. The average lifespan of the worker in 1850 was 32 years. Nevertheless, the workers, many quite fatalistic, hardly protested. The churches' diaconates could not cope with the situation and the government tried to become involved, but the churches objected.

After 1870 industrialization picked up, but while there were improvements in the cities, there was still great poverty in the countryside, due to cheap American grain imports. Although some official industrial inquiries had taken place before 1870, it was not until 1874 that some children's work was restricted. Even to that minimum some

Calvinists objected on the basis that God had limited the government's sovereignty and that this restriction interfered with a family's right.

Christian union movement

In 1871 the General Netherlands Workers' Association (ANWV) was established. Although it made it clear that socialism, revolution and violence were unacceptable, some Christians objected to its views on Sunday work, Christian education and class struggle. In 1873 Klaas Kater (1833-1916) broke with the ANWV and in 1876 transformed an existing association into the new Netherlands Workers' Association, usually referred to as Patrimonium, the first Christian social organization and the ancestor of the CLAC. "Only God's word and the tradition of our nation," its constitution stated, "can be the foundation of a Christian society." Kater, its president, was a fiery combatant for better work conditions and the rights of the workers, although initially he opposed strikes with their accompanying violence. In 1886 he gave up his work as bricklayer and became the editor of Patrimonium's *The Worker's Friend*.

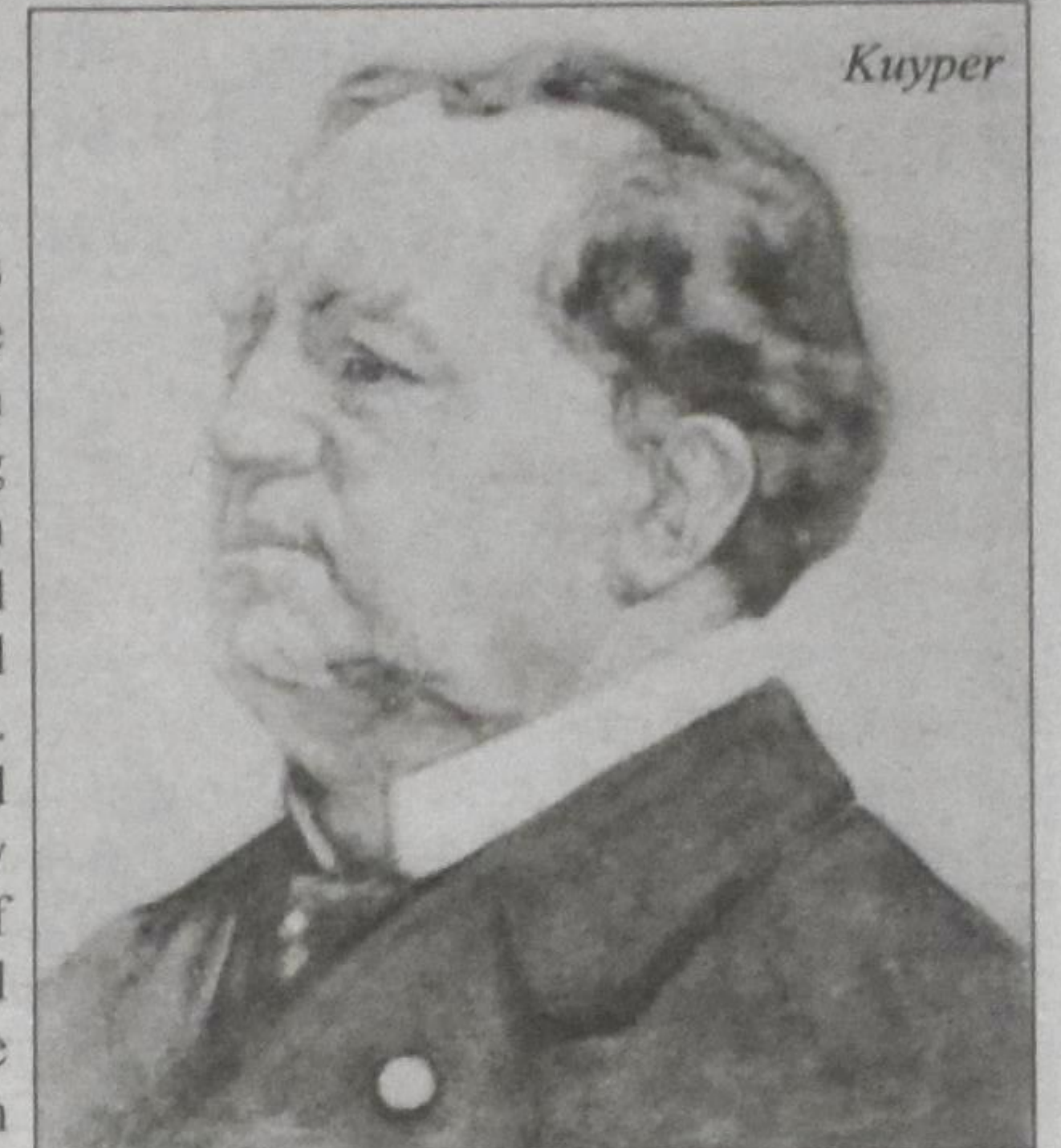
Kater's views had their origin in the

early 19th century, when some members of the Reveil, a revival mainly among the elite, including Bilderdijk and Groen van Prinsterer, showed interest in the emerging "social question." At a social congress in 1891, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) quoted from their work, observing that little had been done since their accusatory comments. "Christian thinkers," he argued, "should already have been labouring for twenty or thirty years ... to plumb the depths of this desperate situation," for the "social question" had "become the question, the burning life-question of the late nineteenth century." Nearly three decades earlier he himself had taken up their torch.

Kuyper's early involvement

In 1863 Kuyper became a minister in Beesd, where he noticed that "the relationship between the landowner and the peasant day labourer was not as it should be.... He saw how the social and legal structures led to a class division in the life of the people that was sinfully unequal rather than the divinely ordained pattern of inequality." Realizing that the social question had a devastating effect on the family, he aroused in his sermons his poor parishioners to political awareness and political struggle, causing a clash with the local noble and wealthy landlord. Practising what he preached, he gave fruit of his own orchard, but made it clear in his 1891 address that such charity would not solve the problem: "charity which knows only how to give money, is not yet Christian love...you also [have to] give your time, your energy, and your resourcefulness to help end such abuses for good." Furthermore, he realized that while the physical needs were appalling, the spiritual need was even more appalling. In fact, the weaker party was first of all *spiritually* and then *materially* oppressed. Becoming aware of the labour problems and the social unrest, he chose for social reform, recognizing that the carefully conserved social order should not continue along the same line.

In 1871 he wrote that "to battle against an isolated social evil, to rescue individuals," was "while excellent, something different from taking hold of the socio-economic problem itself." Since such a battle could only be fought in parliament, he became an MP in 1874, introducing on November 28 a labour code, a complete set of regulations whose equivalence to civil and criminal codes would give labour and economic issues a dramatic new status, and remarking that "there must come and there can come a new, organic life, provided that the organization be not imposed by the state but first take form spontaneously in real life by right of custom and usage, thereafter to be enacted into a code of statutes." The bill failed, but four observations may be made. Although labour unrest was barely beginning and the depression had not yet begun, he



Kuyper

thought that the existing labour situation should not continue. Secondly, he envisaged society as an organic whole, a wholeness broken by liberalism's individualism of the French Revolution. Evidence suggests that organicism contributed to a socio-political conservative perspective: it accepted the unequal dividing in which the poor had to be content with their status, while the rich should protect them, a paternalistic idea hardly acceptable in our present society. Thirdly, there is a hint of sphere sovereignty in his observation that the state could only play a limited role. Only after consultation with all concerned parties could the code come into effect and the state could not impose its paternalistic views. Fourthly, important customs could not be discarded, as had happened during the French Revolution. Only gradually and after careful consultation could they be changed.

Kuyper's 1889 articles

An 1887 report showed enormous socio-economic problems, but "the spirit of discontent and moral decline had remained confined to a small part of those who work with their hands." The deterioration prompted Kuyper in 1889 to write in *De Standaard* a series of seven articles. The disastrous consequences of the French Revolution, he remarked, had not only shattered society's organic whole, instituted liberalism's individualism and self-interest, and destroyed customs, but also had replaced divine transcendence with human rational authority. False premises, he argued, had disastrous consequences, including those for industrialization. Indirectly he accused the government of complacency and suggested that there was an "undeniable need" for legislation. Insightfully he noted that "the market of goods is cosmopolitan and thus influences the country." He also emphasized national over against class

Continued on p. 15



Kater

Zierikzee ca 1860



Muslim spirituality continued from p. 10

of respect for him. Other than some religious pride, he lives a righteous life. When I was serving as a missionary in his country I could trust him with large sums of money to pay bills on behalf of the Mission, and I could do that with few Christians. He is a faithful witness for strict Islam. He seeks to persuade other people to become Wahhabis, and that with some success.

From time to time I used to converse with Baby about Jesus and the Good News. He always came back to the arguments that God could not have a son and that we cannot know that we will be in paradise until we

die. I would point out to him that the Koran calls Jesus the Word of God. I would explore with him what that means. Baby, however, is staunch. I pray that he will have a dream in which he meets Jesus and will begin to trust him as his Lord and Saviour. I pray for the millions of Muslims who have immigrated to Canada. What do we need to do to reach them for Christ?

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His most recent field of service was in Guinea, West Africa, as a missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions.

Transitions

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

When we feel the need for change there is usually some risk involved in letting family members know where we are coming from. Will they become angry or critical? Will they think less of us? The ensuing struggle can bring us face-to-face with one another's insecurities and vulnerabilities in ways that may not solve our problems but send us scurrying back to our familiar corner for the sake of peace. Because, if the truth is told, becoming clear about ourselves is a struggle under the best of circumstances, never mind pushing forward in the face of conflict.

Question:

I am a 42-year old married woman with four children. I have been a stay-at-home wife and mother since my first child was born. My children range in ages from 19, 15, 14 and 12. My husband has always worked full time to support our family. I also have been involved in a variety of church activities since my first child was born. Now, I have a chance of working in a travel agency. My husband and the three younger children are not happy with this possibility. I am disappointed and angry at their response. I have been there for them consistently throughout the years. Now it is my turn to embrace other challenges. My husband is adamant he has enough on his plate and is not interested in sharing household duties. He also believes my church activities should be more than satisfying for me, but I think I need other challenges in my life. I feel I am letting my family and church down if I persist in pursuing my goal with the travel agency. At the same time, I strongly think I need to broaden my world and with the help of my spouse and children I can make this happen.

Response:

First, I want to say your need to "broaden your world" as you so aptly put it is part of normal human development. You have been a stay-at-home mother for close to 20 years. Now you want to have a change of pace and spread your wings. The issue is how to manage your responsibilities at home in a healthy way while also finding fulfillment in this new challenge. I, however, understand the response of your spouse and your three younger children. Most of us do

Scurrying back to safety or pushing forward?

not get overjoyed when we have to make changes in our lives, especially if we have been comfortable with the status quo. However, love, trust and effective decision-making can overcome family challenges when we take everyone's needs into consideration.

So, I suggest you have a candid discussion with your spouse in terms of how you want to make space for yourself in ways that continue to nourish your soul. I also suggest you begin this chat with each of you telling the other what you appreciate the other bringing to the family. Your spouse's dependable breadwinning role and your 20 years as a stay-at-home wife and mother are good examples. This kind of sharing will help you establish common ground. And, while in times gone by family roles were neatly divided, the advances in medicine and technology now allow us to have choices and be more flexible in this area.

Next, be clear in how you see making your wish to work outside the home manageable while also acknowledging your responsibilities inside the home. For instance, what worked in a previous family stage especially when your children were very young may not be helpful as your children are growing into teenage and young adulthood. It just may be that

having a more co-operative family structure in which all children participate by way of chores and other responsibilities may be a better way to go considering their ages. Plus, sharing and therefore modeling a more co-parenting and breadwinning role with your spouse could be beneficial for your children considering our contemporary times. There could also be some benefits for your spouse with you working outside the home: it allows him to feel less burdened by his main breadwinner role.

Last but not least, with regards to the church, I am sure they will be sorry to see you go. However, as said above, to seek further challenges after being an integral part of this community for 20 years is also a normal part of human development. After all, all of life is spiritual wherever we are and whatever we do.

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Lessons in picking up a man at church



Daphne Simpkins

When the old man's walker caught on the green shag carpet and flipped sideways leaving him to totter dangerously unaided in his pilgrimage to his favourite pew on Sunday morning, stout Mildred Budge reacted. She saw that her old friend was about to fall, smack his jaw against the wooden pew, bounce off of that, land badly on the floor where he would break his hip, and end up in the nursing home again where he would die of an infection this time. So, naturally, Miss Budge leapt to her feet with arms outstretched and caught Mr. Johnson securely under the armpits initially. Then, she shifted her right arm to embrace him, and used the other to scoop him up the way a groom traditionally lifts a bride, only she was a sixtyish woman who in the moment of that adrenaline rush had superhuman strength. (She had been strong her whole life but had learned to hide it, the way she had worked hard to keep her gift with numbers a secret, too.)

The members of the congregation, who were already in their respective places, collectively froze, immobilized by the image of an older lady of the church picking up an elder emeritus and depositing him safely on his pew where she then had the indelicacy to grunt. Church-lady sounds included laughing generously at the right time, tsk-tsk-tsking at the other right times, sighing at the sadly right times, and when they were on the verge of being exposed as people who knew how to live wisely, they hid their light under a bushel by dithering, which was accompanied by a fluttering of their hands next to their face as if to fan away the very idea that they knew much of anything. These sounds came easily to

Mildred Budge, but she used them all sparingly, for she embraced the silence assigned to women [not because she was absolutely convinced that shushing women was theologically undeniable (How could you praise God and be quiet, too?), but because she thought people talked too much, and telling one gender to be quiet was an efficient way to keep the hubbub down]. For these and other reasons she was schooled in the discipline of keeping silent and her own counsel. But Miss Budge was also given to being hospitable, and so she made the church-lady sounds when they were called for, and fluttered her hands when paid a compliment, but never, ever grunted until the morning she picked up Mr. Johnson.

The sound echoed, condemning her for her indelicacy and for being stronger than a woman was expected to be. Being strong surprised others. It had surprised Mildred, too, but she was learning how to embrace her strengths, for she needed them. In spite of the many times that the church had launched and relaunched the shepherding system, moving elders and deacons around to try and make meaningful matches between helpers-of-the-church and people in the church who needed help, Miss Budge had never had a shepherd who had ever come to her home to change a light bulb for her. That would have been nice – having a shepherd who would climb a ladder and take out a bulb and put a new one in – but that hope had never been realized. The failure was understandable, for even as women had their own pressures to manage, men in the church did, too. Assigned single women to help, men were simultaneously warned not to be alone with single women for it could lead to moral failure. How could you change a single woman's

Artists

Identifying the source of inspiration

Melissa Kuiper

A few years ago I had a student ask me for feedback on an overtly evangelical story she was developing. She told me a little of the creative process she had experienced: "I don't know, it's weird – it was like I didn't really write this, like God just brought this all to me," she told me. While I deeply appreciate this young person's desire to not take any credit for a storyline so powerful to her, I fear this sort of thinking can be dangerous as we risk attributing qualities to God which do not belong to him, and we may fail to recognize the imperfections in the art we produce, even if it does originate under divine prompting.

In the senior level creative writing course I teach, I recently showed an internet video from a TED conference (a "small non-profit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading") which features Elizabeth Gilbert, best-selling author of *Eat, Pray, Love*, speaking on the topic of "Nurturing Creativity" (www.ted.com). In this 20-minute speech Gilbert dynamically evaluates the way the creative process has been understood throughout Western history. The ancient philosophers and writers viewed the artistic process as something transcendent, in which the artist is merely a vessel for a greater purpose. This belief protects him on the one extreme from narcissism, and on the other from insecurity, because he is, in fact, not the one responsible for what is produced: the daemon or muse or genius gets the credit or the blame.

Owning the muse

During the Renaissance, however, the artist transitions from *having* a genius as a spiritual source of inspiration to *being* a genius. Gilbert suggests that perhaps this is "a bit too much responsibility" – that asking a mere person to bear and reveal "unknowable mysteries" through art is like "asking some-

one to swallow the sun." She acknowledges the centuries-old association between artists and mental illness and hypothesizes that "the pressure has been killing off our artists for the last 500 years." Therefore, her prognosis is that we may need to return to the ancient approach of acknowledging a power greater than our own in the artistic process.

While discussing the video in class, I commented that many Christian artists would attribute that "inspirational experience" in the creative process as the working of the Holy Spirit. "Then why," questioned one insightful student, "are there so many cheesy Christian books?" Why indeed. I'd like to believe that in many cases the artist who produces shallow Christian lit may be attempting to fulfil a divine calling, but ends up opting for the easier, simplified, sweet production rather than one which requires insight and nuance and reflects the complexity of creation.

Two extremes

I'd like to agree with Gilbert, that rational thinking has led Westerners to believe that the individual alone is responsible and recognizable for the art he produces, and, as with most of the effects of rationalism, this has influenced the Christian artistic community as well. We often lose the sense of awe in the artistic process. On the other hand, this sense of awe can lead us to attribute the entire artistic product to God without recognizing that everything we do in life is tainted by the fall. I've known many Christians to claim a fluffy piece of literature as being entirely godly and above criticism simply because it has a Christian publisher.

And so the faithful artist, I believe, must strike a balance which requires humility on both sides of the scales: a humble recognition that we are mere vessels called to represent truth and redemption to the world, and

other considerable strengths in enterprises that might have resulted in a leaner shape that would have telegraphed to others who knew her before it happened dramatically that Sunday morning that she – a church lady in good standing – was strong enough to pick up a falling man at church.

So it came as a surprise to everyone when she did.

Miss Budge could feel the eyes of others upon her as she backed away from Mr. Johnson whose head was lowered, for it was a shame to be picked up by a woman, a shame for a man to be weak even when he was ninetyish, a shame to need help whether you are a man or a woman even if you go to a church where the gospel of Good Samaritanism is taught and where one lesson after another lesson urges the members of the flock to bear one another's burdens. It doesn't say, "Never under any circumstances should a woman of the church pick up a man."

But that happened to Mildred Budge and



Colour Viscosity Etching entitled Man – Adam David by George Langbroek

"As an artist who is a Christian I have often used Solomons Song of Songs as inspiration and guide. This song or poem contains some exquisite love lyrics and is very explicit sexually, as I believe my work does as well. My work has often been referred to as visual poetry. It proclaims an integrated wholeness that is at the centre of a self-giving journey of discovery and fulfillment. We men and women are made physically, emotionally and spiritually to live in love." – George Langbroek

a humble understanding that these Christian messages are shown through a glass dimly and portrayed in imperfect songs, paintings, stories, dances. We must approach our art with prayer for guidance, with fear and trembling, and recognize the artistic process as a holy calling. This principle is true of all we do as believers, and it is difficult to not lean on either the side of recklessly assuming that any good action, word or thought we have is purely God-breathed and unadulterated, or, conversely, concluding that we may take full credit for any good way in which we act, speak or think.

By keeping this balanced recognition, we are able to shed the burdens we so easily bear but have no right to carry. We creative beings should enjoy freedom in the acceptance that his yoke is light.

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social justice issues.



Lessons . . . continued from p. 12

light bulb and not endanger yourself and her, too? Yes, Mildred Budge understood why the shepherd system failed: helping a single lady could lead to the commission of sin, and not helping her was, at its worst, the sin of omission. The consequences of the lesser evil were easier to bear. And besides, somehow single ladies' light bulbs got changed after all.

And so, Miss Budge continued to climb her own ladder when necessary, change her own light bulbs, mow her own front yard, and tote bags of canned goods to various food banks year round. She had learned over and over again that she was not only simply strong – she was incredibly strong – having inherited her daddy's muscle tone, though her muscles were hidden under the fleshy appearance of a woman who enjoyed her food. Famous for her church-family-size cherry cobbles, she had never exercised her

to Mr. Johnson, and the crowd of witnesses were members of the same church who, out of respect for the two of them to be caught in their exposed positions of strong and weak, hastily opened Bibles to meditate upon the scripture in the church bulletin that was highlighted as the day's message and which the preacher would expound upon shortly.

Until then, the flock meditated and prayed, sending up silent prayers of intercession on behalf of Mildred Budge, not sure exactly why they were fearful for her and her reputation, but aware, in some unnamed way, that she had not sinned exactly but had broken one of the unspoken and unwritten commandments about what was expected of women in church.

They prayed for Mr. Johnson, a widower, and when they did, their minds ruminated about how long he had been a widower and whether the 30-year age difference was too great for him and Mildred to live happily ever after with. But, really, she had never

married, and Mr. Johnson could solve that problem. And she could solve his. He obviously needed a caregiver, and she was suited for that task – she could lift him and everything! – and it was in that way that the event was digested and Miss Budge's place and Mr. Johnson's place in the congregation reassigned and also reimagined. There were glints of knowing in the eyes of others that something acceptable, like a romance was possible between the two dears now, and the idea covered a multitude – well, it wasn't a multitude of sins exactly – it was just that one dreadful misstep that occurred not just when Mr. Johnson tripped, but when Mildred Budge, in front of God and everyone, had forgotten who she was supposed to be and how she was supposed to act, and had picked up a man at church.

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Columns



Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Praying into the New Year

At the beginning of the New Year, I like to read old journal or blog entries. I enjoy reading my prayers, and my questions to God. Then I like to spend some time reflecting on the answers, and what is still to come. Most times, God answers in ways that I would not have thought; I love that. I love how creative our God is. So often I get the picture that God has to answer logically and practically. I am sure God loves to surprise me with how he answers. Specifically, the past few years I prayed for a home to call our own, children, provision, and that God would soften and continue to heal my broken heart.

Less than two years ago, Paula and I bought a quaint little home in the west end of Winnipeg. It fits us. We are thankful to have had a realtor who prayed with us in our search for a home. She walked with us and, when we decided to give up the search, she said, "I think I found one you might like." Well, we loved it and knew that, because we had decided to give up "our" search, God had brought this home to us. The house is like us, a work in progress. What we find the most is that people don't generally like to leave our place. That is our one prayer that

our home would continue to be a home of peace and refuge.

God the owner

In the process of working out budgeting and living more disciplined lives, we have realized the importance of finances. We began to realize our responsibility to provide what others need and to be good stewards of what really belongs to God – our provider. He owns it all, and, in a sense, we just rent from him. God has placed it on the hearts of others to provide for us in ways that far exceed our understanding. We are thankful to those who give anonymously, to those who give knowingly and to those who continue to pray. We have been the recipients of food and clothing, and that has been a huge blessing to us. Since we live on a very limited income, we have seen God increase his provision for us, which has increased our faith. It has increased our faith not just in provision, but in our giving, and in the community that we surround ourselves with. God brought us Phoebe Eliese Selah after we said goodbye to Micah and Hannah. We are thankful to have a beautiful child to raise and

cherish, but as I thought this morning in my prayer time, she is God's daughter first. So I relinquished my hold on her and asked God to give me the strength, wisdom and love to raise her as a daughter of a King. She is the apple of his eye, just as she is mine. I ask that God continue to give me a deeper sense of what Father means.

A lot to pray about

We are still praying about the future and what it entails. That God would direct our steps, give us wisdom, ideas, creative ways to make ends meet. That he would bless our imagination, and give us words to speak and write. We still have a big list of things we are praying about. Mostly, we find ourselves praying for others. We are praying for those caught in the lies of gender confusion – those trapped in the enemy's grip of death. We know full well the restorative power of Jesus Christ. That he can do anything. Really. Anything. Why we limit God is beyond me, but I do it all the time. I forget. I have to be reminded. So I write to remember. I write to remind myself of the

faithfulness of God. I have people in my life who say, "Remember what God did?" I pray for the prodigals, searching for a way home. I pray for the poor and needy, the orphans and widows. I pray for the brokenhearted. I pray for Christ's return. Now I pray for our wee one; I pray for Paula my wife. I pray for us, this little family unit, that we would remain faithful in the turmoil of the world around us. That we would stay faithful to God, that we would not fall away. I give thanks for the messes in my life, the brokenness, which points me always to Jesus, my healer and restorer. I press on to the finish. Thank you Lord for answered prayers, for who you are as the FAITHFUL ONE! I give you this year to teach me, teach us. To mold us, refine us, love on us, commune with us, show us your wonder, your power, your might. Come, Lord Jesus, come. May we be like the prepared bride, waiting for you, the bridegroom, who is so in love with us, his bride. ✨

Kenny Warkentin (paintpent@mts.net) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.



From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

If we were to poll non-Christians we know, asking whether any one of the world's religions is *the* truth, and thus stands above the others in what it offers humankind, a majority would likely say No. Relativism is the hallmark of our age.

We Christians are told that to assume, much less boldly state, that *our* faith has something (or Someone) of ultimate consequence to offer that no other faith can match is arrogant and even racist – since most practitioners of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and even Judaism are non-white. (Most of today's Christians are also non-white but that fact flies under the public-perception radar.)

Relative truth has a corollary: it's not kosher to "proselytize," especially in the public square. That prohibition makes perfect sense if truth can be personalized as "my" truth, or "yours," and not THE truth. Why should I foist "my" truth on you if it's only *mine* and doesn't hold for you or others? Those thoughts arose as I read a news story that caused apoplexy among American secular commentators.

Respected newsman Brit Hume, who was jolted from nominal Christianity to seriously embrace Christ after his son committed suicide in 1998, talked about – and to – Tiger Woods on "Fox News Sunday" (Jan. 3). Hume said, "Tiger Woods will recover as a golfer. Whether he will recover as a person is a very open question. It's a tragic situation. He's lost his family. It's not clear to me whether he can heal his relationship with

his children. But the Tiger Woods that emerges once the news value dies out of this scandal – it seems to me that the extent to which he can recover depends on his faith. He's said to be a Buddhist. I don't think that faith offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. So my message to Tiger would be, 'Tiger, turn to the Christian faith, and you can make a total recovery, and you can be a great example to the world.'

Who's intolerant?

The howls of outrage from secular critics began instantly: Hume implied that his own Christian faith was superior to Buddhism; he was dissing Buddhists. He told Tiger he should convert: he was proselytizing. And he had the bad sense to bring up *faith* in TV's public square when any tolerant person would keep faith private so as not to offend.

Some TV talk show hosts actually compared Hume's comments to Islamic extremists' waging of holy war. Media critic Tom Shales called him a "sanctimonious busybody" who was "telling people what religious beliefs they ought to have." Atheist Andrew Sullivan said Hume's comments were "pure sectarianism." MSNBC's David Shuster called the remarks "truly embarrassing."

Hume was "not surprised" and took the



nasty barbs graciously. He did note a double standard. "If I had said ... that what Tiger Woods needed to do was become more deeply engaged in his Buddhist faith or adopt the ideas of Hinduism, which I think would be of great spiritual value to him, I doubt anybody would have said anything." Then he observed, "It is certainly true in secular America today that the most controversial two words you can ever utter in a public space are 'Jesus Christ.'" He's right. That Name evokes no neutrality. Its bearer said he came not to bring peace but the sword. And he warned: "If they hate me, they will hate you also."

Faith claims

Townhall commentator Brent Bozell critiqued the media double standard: "The sudden arrival of these punctilious Emily Posts of religious discussion is strangest because Christianity is so routinely and thoroughly mocked and denigrated across our news and entertainment outlets without an ounce of concern for offending the average

Christian. Hume's chat is intolerable, yet [the adult cartoons] "South Park" or "Family Guy" can put Christianity through a shredder, and they are cheered for their "irreverence."

Most media people don't seem to understand that *all* faiths are comprised of worldviews that make their own claims about truth. If a Muslim woman tried to convince me that Islam offers the best possible way to salvation, would I be offended? I'd have no reason to be. I think I would admire her for daring to share her faith even while being saddened that she had not had the opportunity to meet Jesus. But I could grant that opportunity, if I dared. And to do that would be the most compassionate thing I could do for her (paired with meeting any immediate physical needs).

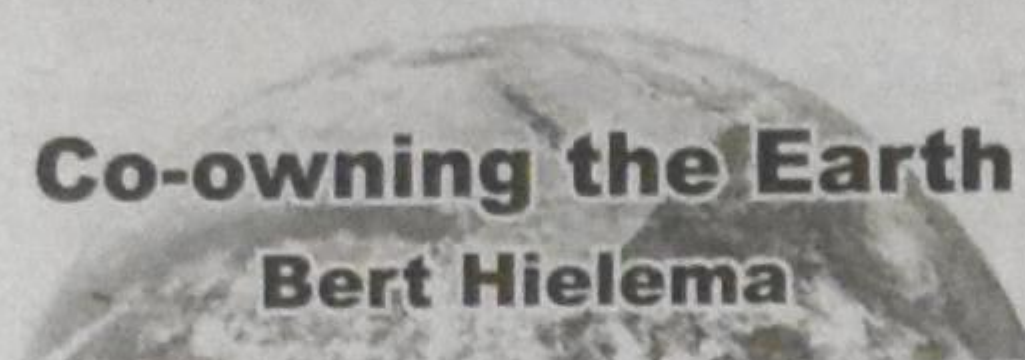
If I dared. I wonder whether I – as opportunities present – will be as bold, courageous and compassionate as Brit Hume was in publicly offering the only real Life Preserver to a drowning man. I pray, literally pray, I will be. The harvest is full but the labourers are few. ✨

Marian Van Til is a former C.C. editor who lives in Youngstown, NY, with her husband and five cats. Her latest book,

Confessions of a Catholic, is available at www.WordPowerPublishing.com or by calling toll-free 877-693-4469.



Society



Co-owning the Earth

Bert Hielema

When our sources of slave labour run dry

During the last week of last year, when we harboured and fed 22 of our children and grandchildren for a couple of days, I still found time to read *Gone with the Wind*, that famous book by Margaret Mitchell. It took me well into the New Year to finish all 1024 pages, and I could not help comparing it with today's circumstances.

The story starts describing the picture-perfect opulence Scarlett O'Hara and the Southern landowners enjoyed prior to that terrible war between the Northern States and the South, which lasted from 1861-1865, and was won by the Industrial north.

That conflict destroyed the idyllic life of the plantation owners who relied on the services of hundreds of black slaves to do the cotton-picking while the white elite partied. Of course, the macho young white men were eager to go to war and teach the North a lesson in manners, lifestyle and warfare.

A global war

Today our way of life resembles the pre-Civil War. Southern luxurious conditions thanks to the hundreds of energy slaves we employ 24/7, a situation too good to last. Just as the defeat of the Confederation of Southern States created economic and social havoc, so we, too, the rich of the world, dependent on the energy provided by the black gold contained in oil and natural gas, will be unable to cope when our sources of slavery – energy derived from oil – will have disappeared, and climate change and declining fuel supplies will make life as we know it impossible.

Abraham Kuyper and work . . . continued from p. 11

interest, a consequence of his organic view and of his opposition to Marxist class warfare. "Manual labour," he indicated, "is of social importance because the class of citizens," forming the majority, had it as their sole means of existence, thus "inevitably exerting an influence on the entire social and domestic condition of the greater part of our nation." As a matter of societal safety, everyone eagerly wanted "to know whether this majority was doing well, had a reasonable existence and was prospering morally, or whether it was depressed by worries, tending towards discontent, and declining in morals."

The articles' tenor was intended as an encouragement, wanting the poor to look "toward a higher ideal, away from the world and its desires." Their didactic purpose was that the poor could "teach the larger part of our nation to be content with little," so that the majority could "catch the luster of a higher ideal." But his clarification of "doing well" as "being content with little" and "cultivating submissiveness and patience" could easily be interpreted by his

Oil and war are two sides of the same coin. Our current "oil war" is not a conflict between North and South, between industry and agriculture, between the rich West and the poor rest. No, our struggle is much more a truly global crusade. We all, almost without exception, are soldiers fighting in World War III: everybody in the world battling creation in an unholy war we can never win.

The years from 2000 through 2009 have been 10 years with triple and double zeros in their numbers. These zeros were also evident in zero gains in the stock market, zero growth in wages and jobs. At the same time there were unprecedented advances in climate-related incidents and terrorists acts.

Global inaction

I was at the UN climate conference in The Hague in 2000 where nothing was resolved. Last month we witnessed the latest Climate Conference in Copenhagen where again

opponents as accepting the status quo.

He agreed with the analysis of the socialists: "We must courageously and openly acknowledge that the Social Democrats are right when they maintain that the situation calls not only for the *physician* but most certainly for the *architect* as well." But he disagreed with their drastic solution resembling the French Revolution's mistake to demolish the traditional labour organizations without replacing them with something new. God had ordained some things and these must be preserved in any reconstruction.

He also castigated Conservatives and Liberals holding the "misguided *idea* that boundless liberty would solve everything." Their *laissez-faire, laissez-passer* economics was outdated and its unbridled liberty had grievous results. Kuyper's own solution included two possibilities. Like Mackenzie King and Leo XIII, he admired medieval guilds. Guilds, he argued, could set a quota of labourers for every trade and help settle disputes. Moreover, more care should be given to the development of *national*



nothing was resolved.

CC stands for a number of things: it stands for Climate Change, Carbon Credit and Copenhagen Cop-out. The mighty of the world tried to do the impossible: pursue a political solution to a physical phenomenon. They might as well have attempted to repeal the Law of Gravity by a majority vote.

Climate Change is a planetary problem that has now gone beyond the human will to remedy.

Climate Change simply comes from too much CO2 (Carbon Dioxide) in the atmosphere. Every time we turn the ignition key in our so-adored automobile, we increase greenhouse gases just a tad and heat up the air just a tiny bit more. Already in 1896, Svante Arrhenius, a Swedish chemist, and one of the first Nobel Prize winners, explained in the *London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine*: "We are evaporating our coal mines into the air.... Eventually this change might very well heat the planet to heights outside all human experience."

Swine formation

That was 114 years ago. Nothing much has changed. Still more than 50 percent of all electricity is generated by coal. The Copenhagen Cop-out reminds me of the phrase coined by theologian Douglas Wilson, *The Gadarene Swine Rule*. It goes as

follows: "Just because a group is in formation, it doesn't mean they know where they are going." This rule, based on Matthew 8:32, tells us that an immense herd of pigs rushed down a steep bank and drowned. In a similar fashion, our world, too, is rushing head-over-heels into a Climate Change Catastrophe.

Already 2000 years ago Paul wrote that "the lust for money is the root of all evil." The Copenhagen Cop-out tells me that, thanks to our lust for money, we can kiss goodbye Africa, kiss goodbye south Asia, places where we send our missionaries. I wonder what their message is. Our lust for money means that we can kiss goodbye to glaciers and coral reefs and rainforests.

We Christians are traveling to an everlasting re-new-ed earth under a re-new-ed heaven, both zero-emissions zones. Our fight – see Ephesians 6:12 – is against the powers of this dark world, which condone Global Warming.

If we want to be part of that Resurrection life and enjoy Life Everlasting, as we confess in the Apostles' Creed, we Christians face an enormous challenge. Our new CC, our Cosmic Challenge, is to consciously live in such a way that our transition to that Zero Emission Life – which ought to be part of today's mission of the Church – is smooth.



Bert Hielema lives in Rural Tweed, Ontario. His blog is <http://hielema.ca/blog>. He can be reached at bert@hielema.ca.

craftsmanship. His updated version of the ancient guilds hints at his limited grasp of industrialization.

Secondly, while government now "had the jurisdiction to change things, provided that it did not violate historic or individual rights," it was his "deepest conviction that it had no jurisdiction to stipulate how labour matters must be regulated even when it concerns the form of contract." It only should come to the aid of labour organizations, such as giving them a *legal* basis. Thus he again suggested that Chambers of labour and of Commerce together could solve various problems. In case of disagreement Councils of Arbitration could settle disputes with binding arbitration. These legally and formally instituted organizations were a significant improvement of the right of labour.



Prologue to the 1891 Congress

Around 1890 serious economic problems plagued Friesland. Injustice was rampant with big farmers, including Christians, oppressing agricultural workers, who suffered great poverty. Patrimonium

provided help in several strikes, but even within the organization the situation was tense. By November 1890 Klaas Kater was willing to break with Kuyper's party (ARP), regarding it as too influenced by its conservative elite. Nevertheless, he invited the ARP to a congress dealing with the social question, which would give an opportunity to think about the implications of Christian social thinking. With the whole issue causing tension within the ARP, Kuyper, invited as the congress' central committee's chairman, wanted to convene the congress as quickly as possible. After several postponements it was decided that it would coincide with Patrimonium's annual meeting, November 9-12, 1891. As an advertisement of November 5 indicated, in addition to Kuyper and Kater, the organizing committee, the section leaders and section reporters comprised a large number of political, ecclesiastical, academic, and aristocratic leaders.

Note: This article will continue in our next issue.

Classifieds/Review

Birthday		Obituaries		
	<p>With thankfulness to God, we congratulate</p> <p>John Bergsma</p> <p>on the occasion of his 100th Birthday on February 4, 2010</p> <p>Love from his children, Jim Bergsma (deceased), <i>Langley, B.C.</i> Jenny Kleine, <i>Abbotsford, B.C.</i> Bernie & Margaret Bergsma, <i>Georgetown, Ont.</i> Esther Post, <i>Abbotsford, B.C.</i> Margaret & Fred Bosma, <i>Lethbridge, Alta.</i> 18 grandchildren 15 great-grandchildren</p> <p>Celebrating with an Open House on February 4, 2010, 2 - 4 p.m. at Menno Home, 2021 Primross Street, Abbotsford B.C.</p> <p>Correspondence to Mr. John Bergsma Menno Hospital 106 - 1 - 32945 Marshall Road Abbotsford BC V2S 1K1</p>	<p>MARYANN VYN (nee Alblas) passed away early on New Years morning after a courageous and lengthy battle with cancer.</p> <p>She will be greatly missed by her loving husband, Jake and dear children Jeremy, Angela, Phillip and Shelley as well as her many extended family and friends.</p> <p>Funeral Service was conducted at the First Christian Reformed Church of Guelph on Tuesday, January 5th at 10:00 a.m.</p> <p>In lieu of flowers, donations to Beginnings Counselling and Adoption Services of Ontario or Woodland Christian High School would be appreciated. http://www.beginnings.ca/ http://www.beginnings.ca/donate.htm http://www.woodland.on.ca/ http://www.woodland.on.ca/donate.htm</p>	<p>HUGO VAN RIJ</p> <p>On Sunday, January 10, 2010 our Lord called his faithful servant Hugo to his heavenly home, one week before reaching the age of 91 years.</p> <p>Predeceased by his beloved wife Agnes in 1992, Hugo is mourned by his numerous nieces and nephews in the Netherlands.</p> <p>He will be missed and affectionately remembered by his many dear friends in Calgary and other parts of Canada.</p> <p>Interment took place in Queen's Park Cemetery, Calgary on Monday, Janu- ary 18, 2010 at 12:00 p.m. A Memorial Service followed at Emmanuel Christian Reformed Church, Calgary at 2:00 p.m. with Reverend Ed Jager, Officiating.</p> <p>In lieu of flowers a memorial donation to a charity of one's choice is appreci- ated. Expressions of sympathy may be forwarded to the family via the website www.fostersgardenchapel.ca</p>	<p>March 2, 1945 - January 1, 2010-</p> <p>WILMA HOLLAND born Wiepkje Saakje Greidanus</p>  <p>passed away peacefully on Friday January 1, 2010 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.</p> <p><i>Praise the Lord, O my soul! Psalm 103</i></p> <p>It is with love and fond memories that we lay to rest our mother, sister, aunt and friend. She lived life to its fullest, traveled, experienced and was touched by those who encountered her. There are no words to explain the loss we feel without her here.</p> <p>She leaves behind her daughter Hilary, (husband Darren) and their many ani- mals; sisters Janny, Corrie, Alice, Joanne and families, brothers John, Don, Burt, Leo and families, many nieces/nephews and families and her many adopted chil- dren including the Kowaluk family.</p>

Breath-taking Avatar?

A theological reflection on the latest blockbuster

Daryl DeKlerk

The movie *Avatar* landed on our planet at Christmas, and has since made quick inroads into hearts and minds. As of January 13 it had grossed over \$435 million in the US alone, with popularity rising across the world, including in China. Sure enough, young adults jammed the London, Ontario Cineplex theater late on Christmas Day when I saw it. But while some aspects of the movie are certainly breathtaking, *Avatar* blatantly attempts to take the wind out of Christianity's sails.

James Cameron's epic is fascinating to watch in 3D. The visual effects are so realistic that you marvel at what God has enabled us to do with technology (as Lloyd Rang described well in CC's January 11 issue). Equally impressive in *Avatar* are the geological and botanical wonders of the far-off planet Pandora, where most of the action takes place. Pandora is an imaginary world of floating mountains, pristine waterfalls, and trees so big that whole villages live in them. It reminded me of the wild potential I sometimes imagine God's new heaven and earth will have.

Yet sadly any praise to the almighty creator-God is lacking in *Avatar*. Instead, as a thoughtful article by Ross Douhat in the *New York Times* pointed out (Dec. 21, 2009), "Avatar is a long defense of pantheism." Pantheism is the belief that nature is God. Pantheism derives from the ancient Greek words for all (*pan*) and god (*theos*). It was the religion of choice for the Old Testament

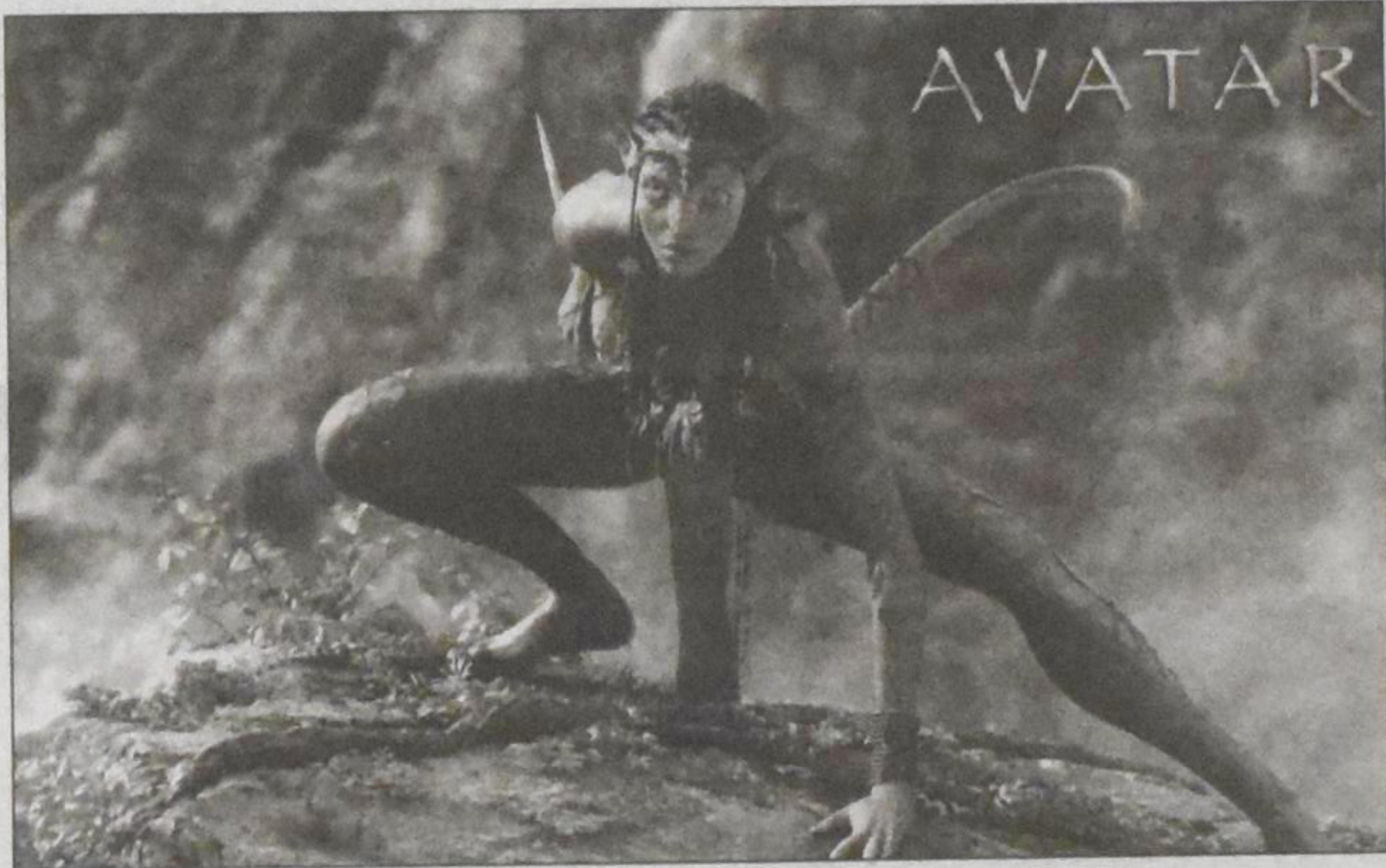
people of Canaan before God settled Israel there.

In *Avatar* the human-like inhabitants of Pandora worship nature. Several scenes show them in prayerful meditation around their sacred tree, with resurrection from the dead topping their prayer list. All of this may seem to be innocent, imaginary Hollywood dazzle. But Pandora's inhabitants quickly become the protagonists and humans the bad guys. The human commander's name is even Augustine, a shot against the fourth-century church father who most inspired the 16th century church Reformers.

Created to worship

In spite of the insult, Christians can identify with pantheism's desire for heaven and earth to meet. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ captivates us precisely because it embodies and answers this hope. Healthy Christian engagement with any of this world's religions begins on such bridges of common ground. The Reformed missions-theologian J.H. Bavinck, in echoing John Calvin, said that people of various religions, "can be called earnest seekers for God." "At least, heathen have still some awareness of divine powers, some measure of reverence, awe and want for worship, though the realization can be quite confused and directed towards the wrong object" (Address to the Free University of Amsterdam, October 20, 1955).

It's not hard to see how we've come to popular pantheism in our culture. For generations children in public schools have been taught



that nature is nothing but blind chance without God. So it's not much of a stretch now for movie-makers to convince them that nature is God. After all, everyone longs to worship something, as the real St. Augustine said. Flashy 3D technology makes it even easier to shove pantheism uncritically into jaw-dropped mouths.

A glance back in time will remind us that we've seen this out of Hollywood before. As Ross Douhat also noted, pantheism came packaged as "the Force" in *Star Wars* and also pervaded movies like *Dances with Wolves*, *The Lion King* and especially *Pocahontas*. Christians should recall our critique of those movies for healthy dialogue now about *Avatar*. Yes, we too enjoy and study creation, but we do so in order to worship the eternal Creator: "Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them" (Psalm 111:2). And yes, we agree on the need to look beyond ourselves for redemption and hope for a perfect future, but

as Haiti's terrible earthquake tragically shows, nature "groans" as much as we do with the imperfections of this age.

The story goes of another wise 20th century theologian, Karl Barth, who walked into a classroom where someone had written on the blackboard, "God is other people." Silently pondering a way to correct it, he simply added a comma, and left it on the board, "God is other, people."

So along with pantheists, we may certainly appreciate nature. But appreciation of creation is one thing, and worship quite another. We're far-better off reserving our worship for the One who, precisely because he is distinct (other) from his creation, was able to fuse heaven and earth like no other has or will: Jesus Christ. Then out of our love and thankfulness for God's salvation, Christians can turn hearts and hands to healthy stewardship of the earth. But for the same \$20 and three hours you'd spend on *Avatar*, Christians will learn far more from Calvin De-

Classifieds

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION *Christian Courier* is published on the second and fourth Mondays. Deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.

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Witt's practical book *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues* (2007, Faith Alive Resources). *Avatar* may well land on your water-cooler or dinner-time conversations, and a healthy Reformed response will be to affirm its breath-taking qualities without letting it kick the wind out of Christianity.

Daryl DeKlerk is the pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ontario.

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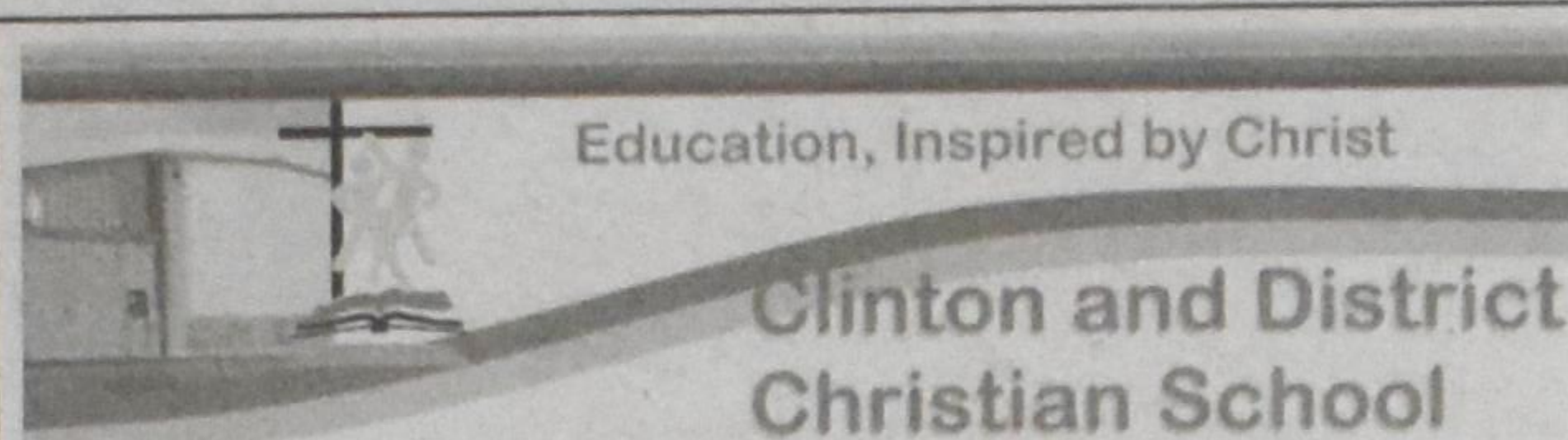
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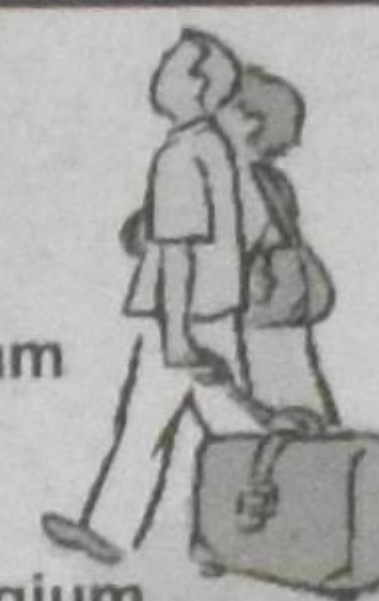
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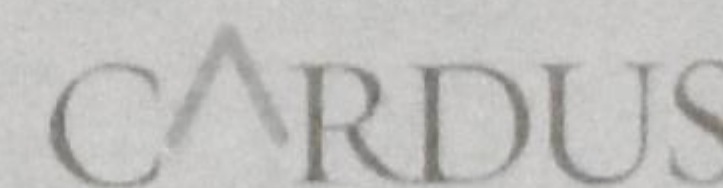
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Dutch Apple Coffee Cake (Nederlandse Appel Koek):

Ingredients:

3/4 cup light sour cream
1 1/4 tsp. baking powder
1 2/3 cup all purpose flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1/3 cup unsalted butter
1/2 cup extra finely granulated sugar (also called berry or basterd sugar)
1 large egg
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 Granny smith apples, peeled and sliced
8 oz. mild Gouda Cheese cut in wedges
2/3 cup Demerara (coarse dark) brown sugar
1/2 cup slivered almonds or hazelnuts

Preparation:

Mix the sour cream and baking powder in a bowl, set aside. In a separate bowl, mix the flour and salt. Cream the butter and berry sugar. Add the egg and vanilla extract, beating until light and fluffy. Add the sour cream to the butter mixture. Mix well. Add the flour and salt mixture and again, mix well.

Grease a 9" square glass pan and spread 1/2 of the batter in the pan. Place 3/4 of the apples and cheese wedges in a concentric circle on top of the batter. Add remaining batter and top with the rest of the cheese and apples. Mix the brown sugar and nuts and sprinkle on top of the cake. Bake for 35 minutes at 375 degrees.

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Jan 13 The World and our Calling Annual Lectures at Redeemer University College, **Ancaster**. Dr. James Payton, Jr. will be speaking on "Calvin in Focus." Invitation is open and admission is free. For more information contact Marlene Raddatz at 905.648.2131 X4414 or mraddatz@redeemer.ca

Jan. 24 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m.

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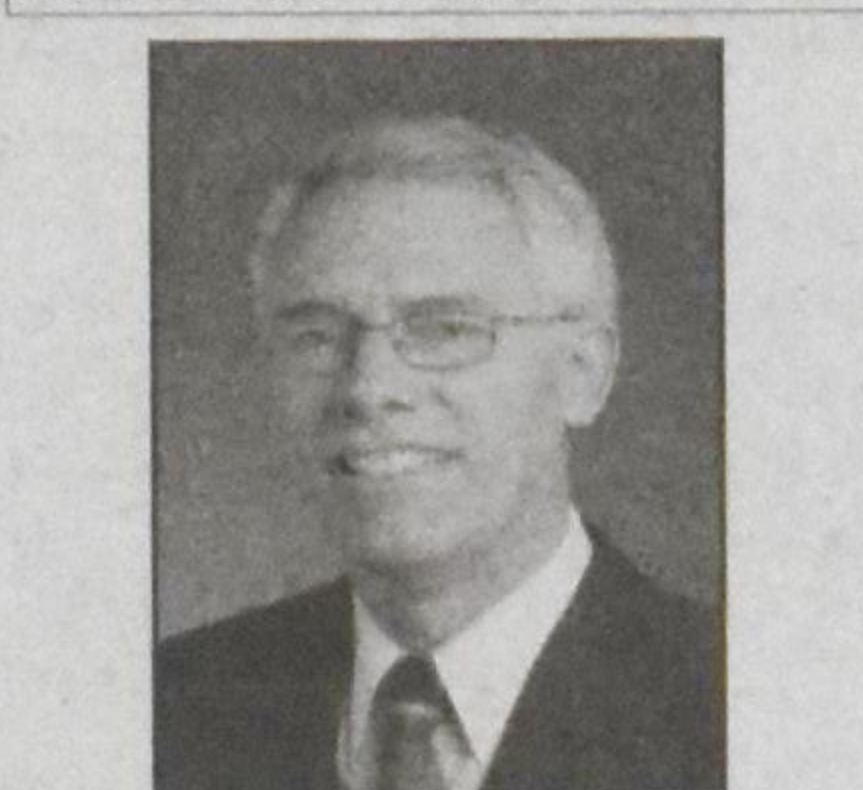


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		4				3		
	3		1		8		5	
2			9		5			8

News

Tree-huggers are people-huggers: Creation care and social justice



Jody and family at Killarney Provincial Park.

Jody Van Dorp

Psalms 24:1 says that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it," and I have come to realize that "everything" includes people. I have always been more willing to hug people than trees, and I'm just learning to see more fully the relationship between the two. As a sticker on my laptop says, "tree-huggers are people huggers."

I grew up in a family with a large vegetable garden, huge composter, and several recycling bins for proper sorting. I always assumed these things were normal, but I've learned that my family is a little weird! As I grew older and studied the intricacies of creation and the connections between organisms (both on the micro and macroscopic level) I became a bit of a "green" freak — advocating recycling, reduced emissions, composting, and so on. I marvelled at the beauty of my surroundings and wanted others to be able to witness that beauty, not the stench of landfills.

Later, I realized that we should care for creation because it is an open book of God's works, and a place where people can witness his power and glory. Part of God's marvellous creation is that we are all wired differently; I'm wired so that I experience God especially through nature. I remember a cross-country ski-trip with my sister through a pine forest. It had just snowed, so the branches were glistening. I felt like I was in a cathedral constructed by God's hands. It is during these times that I wonder how people can witness such glory and not recognize the awesomeness of our God.

The earth is the Lord's . . .

More recently, I've begun to see the connection between the environment and social justice. Last summer I took an alpine

ecology class. I thought the conversation about life on glaciers would be a short one: nothing can survive. I was wrong! One type of algae (normally green) has red pigments that allow it to capture more energy from the sun. It lives through the icy winters and provides food for the dozens of microfauna that live there. Spiders and other insects then prey on these species. The final culmination of this very small web is the gray-crowned rosy finch, which primarily feeds from these batches of insects, whose life is based on algae, which lives in the snow. This is one simple cycle, and it's so amazing to me! But what happens when part is negatively affected? What happens if that snow was to disappear?

This simple example of God's ingenuity is expanded times a million when we look at the global community. And the impact of changing one part can be illustrated in a comparison between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

. . . And everything in it

These two countries share an island. They have extremely similar climatic conditions, yet the two are incredibly different. The Dominican is a tourist destination that, until the recession hit, had seen strong economic growth for the past few years. Haiti, on the other hand, is the poorest country in the Americas. Eighty percent of its population lives in poverty, which is double the rate of the Dominican, and over fifty percent live in abject poverty. These differences can-

not be attributed to one single factor, but the overexploitation and degradation of the natural resources in Haiti is a big one. Currently, less than two percent of Haiti's original forest is left. The hills are no longer covered and the rains wash quickly down the slope, creating flash floods. Hurricane season in Haiti is deadly, killing tens of thousands of people in recent years. The trees that acted as a barrier are gone. Most of the watersheds that brought water out to sea have been destroyed — the water flows through the streets and homes of these people who subsist day by day.

Agriculture is the main industry in Haiti, but the soil leaves with the heavy rains and what remains is so baked by the sun that growing anything on the mountainous slopes is infinitely more difficult than it once was. The soils that run down the mountain make their way into the sea, pushing fish further and further away from the coast. Life in Haiti becomes more difficult and hurricane season more hazardous every year. Many individuals there spend up to eight hours a day finding fuel to cook their food.



Children search through flotsam in Haiti.

I wish I could say that Haiti is a solitary case. However, sixty percent of the world's ecosystems are degraded or unsustainably used. A representative of A Rocha International, a Christian conservation organization, says "The rural poor depend directly on the natural resource base; this is their pharmacy, supermarket, and fuel station. It is the power company and the water company. What would happen to you if these things were removed from your neighbourhood?"

In addition to fighting for their everyday needs, there are places around the world where people fight for their lives over issues relating to the environment. Some experts say that wars of the future will be based on environmental issues. We don't worry about water in Canada, but many other countries have to.

the
green belt
movement
international



From wonder to care

I am hopeful about the responses that are happening. The Green Belt Movement started in Kenya in 1977 to re-forest the country, and it has seen tremendous success. Thirty million trees have been planted, transforming landscapes and preventing erosion while also proving to many the link between a healthier ecosystem and a better life. Women in Kenya have become empowered,



Wangari Maathai

not only as stewards of the environment, but of their own lives and of their country. This movement has spread beyond its national borders and is now seen working globally. Some of the greenbelts initiated by this movement acted as buffers against the 2004 tsunami, saving thousands of lives. The founder of the movement, Wangari Maathai, was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2004. In her acceptance speech and as an explanation for why an environmentalist should be awarded the peace prize, she said "There can be no peace without equitable development and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space."

But you know what is the most exciting? I don't have to look to Kenya to be hopeful. Living in the Redeemer community, I have met many people who are passionate about creation care and actively trying to change the way they live. People are encouraging their families at home to begin composting and recycling. Maybe my family won't be so weird anymore! Let's continue to take these steps without losing sight of the reason we are able to.

Jody Van Dorp is a third year student at Redeemer University College. She grew up on the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario. She is pursuing the fields of Environmental Science and Business.

